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March 7, 1882.

Vol. X.

Single
Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 241.

BILL BRAVO, AND HIS BEAR PARDS; Or, THE ROUGHS OF THE ROCKIES.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "NICK O' THE NIGHT," "HIDDEN LODGE," "NIGHTINGALE NAT," "OLD FROSTY," "DANDY JACK," "KIT HAREFOOT," ETC.



"FOR'ARD, PARDS!" CALLED OUT BILL TO HIS BEARS. "NOW, MEN OF CINNAMON, PULL ON 'EM EF YOU DARE."

BILL BRAVO AND HIS BEAR PARDS;

OR,

The Roughts of the Rockies.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "ARKANSAW," "CAPTAIN BULLET,"
"PLUCKY PHIL," "OLD FROSTY," "DANDY
JACK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

[AMONG the mountains of the western boundary of Montana stood the two hundred shanties that, collectively, went by the pretentious name of Cinnamon City. The streets were wide and irregular, as though the denizens of Cinnamon cared more for room than system, and there wasn't a bay window in the whole town.

Like the majority of mountain towns, Cinnamon owed its existence to an accidental discovery. An outlaw known as Progress Paul, fleeing from the Vigilantes of Virginia City, found refuge and gold near the site of Cinnamon. He could not keep secret his discovery, and almost before he had staked out his claim, he found fifty adventurers around him, and the foundation of a town, soon to be known in border annals, was laid among the mountains.

To the new gold region flocked the halter's own from all parts of the North-west. The crack of the ready revolver seldom ceased to ring in the ears of Cinnamon's citizens, and a little graveyard on the mountain side soon contained the bodies of a score who had died in the streets "with their boots on."

Progress Paul was among the first to die thus, but he left behind associates whose wild names were as outlandish as his own, and who carried, as he had done, their lives at the muzzle of the six-shooter and on the point of a fourteen inch bowie.]

It was near the close of a warm September day when a young man well mounted drew rein before a queer-looking guide-post planted in a stone-pile in the mountains about ten miles south of Cinnamon City.

There was a look of gentility in the youth's face which proclaimed him rather out of place in that savage part of Uncle Sam's domain. His eyes were mildly blue, like a young girl's, his figure was well shaped, but feminine. In short, he looked like a young school-teacher in search of a school.

If he was armed he did not exhibit the usual sign of the frontier, although he might have a brace of revolvers in the saddle-bags carried by his horse.

"They need schooling in these parts, that's a fact," he remarked in an audible tone as he gazed at the guide-board roughly nailed to the upright post in the stone-pile.

This was nothing more than a hewn slab on which was a skeleton hand followed by the inscription; "Cinnamon, 10." The hand pointed in a northerly direction, and the distance located the famous Cinnamon City of Montana. But, the guide-board had been adorned with the products of the region. At one end were painted two crossed bowies, a revolver and a rope.

From one end of the latter dangled the frightful caricature of a man, while between the crossed blades was a rude representation of a human heart transfixed with an arrow.

These pictures of course riveted the young man's gaze upon them.

"My introduction to Cinnamon will not be pleasant, I'm afraid," he said with a smile. "Revelation Rube said he would post me wherever he went, but I see no signs of his presence here. Bowie, revolver, and noose! A traveler—a visitor to Cinnamon—is supposed to take his choice here, I fancy. I'll defer mine if nobody raises an objection."

The speaker urged his horse from the spot, and soon was moving once more upon the city in the mountains.

Longer and denser grew the shadows as night approached, and a bend in the trail hid the guide-board and its hideous illustrations from view.

All at once the youth's horse gave a snort of terror and started back as though a rattlesnake had hissed under his feet.

"What's the matter now?" cried the rider who had been almost unseated by his animal's demonstration. "We are yet five miles from Cinnamon, and— A grizzly, by my life!"

The youth had discovered the cause of his steed's fright.

In the trail before him stood one of the largest grizzlies he had ever seen—absolutely huge, monstrous and menacing. He must have appeared suddenly from the bushes that fringed the trail on his right, for a moment before his horse's wild action the youth had looked down the road and seen nothing.

A thousand-pound grizzly in one's road, five miles from the nooses and bowies of Cinnamon City, was not a pleasant sight for the traveler.

"Go on!" he said to his horse, but the animal, not heeding the spurs, seemed to brace himself anew, and stubbornly disobeyed.

Meanwhile the rider had drawn a brace of elegant revolvers, which he thrust past his horse's head as he ordered the animal to move on.

"I must go on to Cinnamon, bear or no bear!" fell resolutely from his lips, and the next moment he had leaped to the ground and was advancing upon the huge beast.

Not a muscle quavered as the young man went forward; his blue eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire, and he held the revolvers out with the nerve of an old borderman.

"Hold on there!" exclaimed a rough but not unmusical voice, as the young adventurer halted within twenty feet of the waiting grizzly and glanced over the glittering barrel of his right-hand revolver. "That b'ar belongs to me, stranger, an' I'll trouble you by askin' you to lower yer dropper."

The youth instinctively turned and cast his eyes up the ascent on his left to see the man who had the audacity to claim to be the owner of a wild grizzly bear.

"Hyar I am, stranger," continued the same voice, which directed the youth's gaze to the speaker. "Shall I come down, er shall the b'ar bring you up?"

This was followed by a wild laugh, so full of good-humor that the traveler lowered his revolver and seemed to forget the grizzly in his path in the presence of the man and his companion standing in full view overhead.

"I can't come up well," he answered back.

"Then I'll come down."

The next moment a man and a bear came down the brushy side of the pass and stood on a level with the astonished traveler.

"My handle is Bill Bravo, stranger," said the bear-man, who was a person of two-and-thirty, a really handsome mountain giant with broad shoulders and eagle eyes of raven darkness. He wore a suit of new buckskin, elegantly fringed and ornamented, and a cap made from a coyote skin set jauntily upon his head, but did not hide the long black hair that fell round his neck.

"We've met for the first time," he went on, eying the traveler from head to foot. "You appear strange in these parts. Never heard ov me, I presume—ov me an' my pets," he added, patting the heads of the two monsters that flanked him.

"You are a stranger to me."

"Whar did you come from?"

"From Virginia City."

"Then you certainly heard of Bill Bravo."

"Never."

"That's strange."

"Pardon me. I was seeking another man."

"That may account for it, an' you didn't git acquainted with any ov my friends, Rocket Rob, Sonora Saul an' thet class ov humanity. Goin' to Cinnamon, eh?"

"Yes."

"You must be goin' to start a church, ef I read you c'rectly," said Bill with a ludicrous expression on his bronzed face.

"Not exactly," was the reply, "although you'll admit that such an institution might benefit society in Cinnamon City. I would think so at least from the appearance of the guide-board five miles back."

Bill broke into a fit of laughter.

"You saw it then, with its knives, revolvers, and the like?" he exclaimed. "You didn't notice a bullet hole between Cinnamon and the number ten."

"I was not looking for bullet holes."

"P'raps not. What's yer handle?"

"Nat Grayscot."

"Got any nickname?"

The young traveler flushed.

"They dubbed me Dictionary Nat at Virginia."

"Because ov yer schoolin' I presume. But, let me tell you, Dictionary, about thet bullet hole. Just about two months ago me an' Rocky Dan, hyar, war lyin' up on the moun'tin sunnin' ourselves, when I see'd a chap pilin' up rocks nigh the pass whar the trails cross.

He war too industrious to hev no object in view, so I watched him jest to see what he war goin' to do. Arter awhile he dragged thet post an' its board from the bushes an' planted 'em among the rocks. Then he stepped back an' looked at his job. Thar war nothin' on the slab then but 'Cinnamon, ten.' All at once a thought seemed to strike 'im, an' he brought a can ov paint from the side ov the pass an' painted them knives an' things you saw awhile back. I watched 'im till I got tired. Rocky Dan kept growlin' an' lookin' me in the eye, but I shook my head, for he wanted to go down and muzzle the painter. So I took out one ov my six-shootin' cathartics an' sent a bullet whizzin' by the fellar's ear. Whew! how he dropped his brush an' got down from the stone pile! I didn't intend to hit 'im. I jest wanted to take the work off his hands. If I'd let him go on he might be thar yet ornamentin' the guide-board."

Bill Bravo paused in his narration to laugh a moment.

"He looked kind o' wild like arter he stood on the ground once more," he continued. "He drew his shootin' irons an' said somethin' about makin' a sieve ov the man who had shot at Revelation Rube."

"Revelation Rube?" echoed Dictionary Nat, in a tone that startled the bear-man.

"Thet's the name. You know him then?"

"He is my enemy."

"Ov course! He fairly chawed the ground fur five minutes all around the stone pile while me an' Rocky lay in the bushes an' hed the performance all to ourselves. He's not dangerous, is he Dictionary?"

"He's a devil!"

"Thet's yer view ov 'im. Do you know where he is now?"

"If he put up the guide-post 'a few days ago he must be in the vicinity of Cinnamon City at this time."

"An' you war goin' thar?"

"That's my destination."

"I b'lieve I'll go along. They've givin' me warnin' to stay out ov the town; but, what does thet matter?"

Nat Grayscot looked into the speaker's face.

He would like such a resolute companion, now that he was about to enter Cinnamon City where Revelation Rube might be; but he had not thought of asking Bill Bravo to accompany him.

"I'm goin' with you! We might ez well be pard, Dictionary," resumed Bill, while Nat looked at him. "I hev'n't hed a pard since the Injuns shot Brazos Ben, five year ago, on the Gila. You may need me in Cinnamon, an' who knows but thet I may find use fur you?"

So they shook hands between the two grizzlies, and thus began a friendship which was to be tested and tried by scenes memorable even in the annals of the wild West.

"Are you goin' to take your bears with you?" asked Nat.

"Thet's jist what I'm goin' to do," was the reply. "The boys down at Cinnamon may want to see the cubs."

Cubs! Each monster weighed at least a thousand pounds!

CHAPTER II.

THE HUNT FOR VENGEANCE.

WHEN Dictionary Nat turned to his horse he found the animal still staring with dilated eyes at the pet grizzlies, and unwilling to join their company.

"I'll send the b'ars ahead," said Bill, taking a request out of Nat's mouth, and the next moment in response to a word and a wave of his hand, the two bears trotted off and soon disappeared.

"We'll take a peep at my den afore we tackle Cinnamon City," the bear-tamer continued. "It lies slightly out ov our trail, but that doesn't matter. You're in no hurry to grapple with Revelation Rube an' his pards, I presume?"

"No," replied the young adventurer; "but I long to tell the rascal to his teeth that I am not afraid of him."

A look of admiration beamed in Bill's eyes. "I like you a'ready," he said. "You've got a wagon-load of the kind o' grit people need in this kentry. I would like to know what brought you hyar, but that's none ov my bizness, an'—"

"I don't mind telling you."

"Not now, nor hyar. Wait till we get to the den."

Bill seemed pleased at the thought that Nat was willing to confide in him, and the two walked side by side down the mountain trail, Nat leading his horse by the bridle while he conversed with his new-found friend.

"Hyar we ar," said the grizzly king, halting after a mile had been traversed. "Lead yer horse into that little pass between them rocks, an' leave 'im thar for the present."

Nat obeyed and rejoined his companion, who was looking up the rather precipitous ascent that rose before him.

"Yonder's the home ov the Invincible Three," he said, glancing at the youth. "One ov my pard is waitin' for us, Dictionary. Rocky Dan made a doorkeeper ov himself when he was a baby."

About thirty feet above the bed of the trail appeared the front of a small mountain cabin. Nat Grayscot could see no more of the structure. The small doorway was almost entirely taken up with the head and four-quarters of a huge grizzly, whose eyes were fixed on Bravo and himself. He knew, of course, that this was the bear-tamer's abode, but still his hand moved mechanically to his revolver, and Bill, who saw the movement, broke into a good-natured laugh.

"You'll never hev to use yer droppers on any ov my b'ars. They know you a'ready, an' they're willin' to shed ther last drop ov blood for you."

The two men went up the path that led to the bear-guarded home which they entered, and found themselves in a large cavern whose only light was that which entered at the little door.

Bill Bravo then explained that his home was a veritable cavern in the hillside, that he had erected the front of a cabin for the purpose of concealing the large original opening of the place, as well as to give his abode a somewhat civilized appearance.

"You hev'n't seen the rest ov the family," averred Bill, turning to Nat with a smile when he had kindled a fire on the floor of the cave. "Go an' bring in the little pards, Rocky," he resumed, addressing one of the grizzlies, who immediately disappeared.

A minute later a chorus of snaps and snarls greeted Dictionary Nat's ears, and Rocky Dan, the grizzly, reappeared, followed by four young bears as large as good-sized pigs. The quartette were in playful mood, for they jostled each other in true bear style, and snapped playfully at Rocky Dan's flanks as they came forward.

At sound of Bravo's voice the whole four rose instantly on their hind feet and walked into his presence where they extended their right paws for a shake.

"Allow me to introduce you to the boys, Dictionary," said the bear-tamer with a smile as he turned to Grayscot. "Touch the paws an' make four more friends. You may need the boys one of these days."

Nat did not hesitate, but carried out the ludicrous introduction in laughing mood, and the cubs dropped on all-fours again.

"I wouldn't sell them b'ars for the'r weight in gold," declared Bill proudly. "They guard the den when Rocky Dan an' Dandy Dick ar' off somewhar with me. They'd make a nasty fight ef they ar' cubs. I'd hate to tackle 'em when they git the'r dander up."

Dictionary Nat coincided in Bill's opinion, and watched the antics of the cubs who were wrestling like young athletes in the firelight.

Meanwhile, the fire blazing up had illuminated the entire cavern, or as far back as it seemed to extend. Nat saw on one of the whitish walls the inscription: "B'ar's Retreat," and below it the admonition that "strangers hed better keep outen hyar on account ov the'r health." The same hand which had traced the rude letters on the wall had drawn there striking representations of bowies and revolvers.

"My pictures make you think ov the guide-board, eh?" exclaimed Bill Bravo, noticing Nat's glance. "I'm a poor artist, Dictionary, but when it comes to usin' them things—I'll hev to re-far you to the b'ars for particulars."

"I hope you'll not have to use them on this trip to Cinnamon," replied Nat.

"Ov course you hope so, but we'll wait an' see. Now, I'm goin' to ask you to tell me what brought you into this kentry. You came from Virginia City. That's all I know, Dictionary."

Nat Grayscot turned from the pictures on the wall and seated himself on a log in the light of the fire. Bill had already stretched himself on the ground, and was looking up into his face, while the family of bears sat around like veritable human listeners.

"You may laugh when I inform you that six months ago I was overseeing the studies of six hundred scholars in a town east of the Mississippi," began Nat.

"I thought you war a book-expounder ov some kind when I first sot eyes on you," smiled Bill. "But, drive ahead. I'll not put my finger in the pie ag'in until it's done."

"Six months ago I had no notion of crossing the Missouri. One day I received a letter which bore the post-mark of Virginia City. An hour after reading it I had resigned and was foot-loose with six months' salary in my pocket. You are wondering what the contents of that letter were. Here it is."

As he paused, Dictionary Nat from his pocket drew a letter which he unfolded in the light of the fire and extended to the king of the grizzlies. Bill took it and raising himself on an elbow bent forward for the purpose of mastering its contents.

"I'm a poor scholar," he remarked. "You'd hev kicked me out ov yer college, Dictionary, but anybody ought to be able to read this letter because it's short an' in big print ez ef it war written with a bowie."

Dictionary Nat started.

"The man who wrote it had a bowie on his person. I am now certain of that," he said.

The letter was short and written in a large if not very legible hand. The letters seemed an index to the writer's nature, rough and fearless, and the paper was characteristic of the wild West, dingy and not at all clean.

There was no heading to the communication, as though the writer had expected the post-mark on the envelope to answer that purpose, and as there was but one line scrawled across the sheet Bill Bravo mastered it in a short time.

He read these words:

"I have run your game down. It is here in Virginia City. Be quick if you are not afraid to corral the wildcat."

"That is the letter that brought me to Virginia City," continued Grayscot as the bear king looked up from the signature. "It is a mystery to you, I see. It contains one mystery for me, and that is the signature. Let me go back five years. Nathan Grayscot, my father, was a prosperous merchant in Illinois at that time. He dabbled some in western lands, and at times had a good deal of money in the house. One night our house was burglarized and father was shot at the head of the stairs as the thieves were decamping with their booty. It was an atrocious murder. I was at school at the time, and took an oath to hunt his slayers down. But they had disappeared, and the officials gave up the hunt almost before father was buried. Mother was afraid that I would lose my life if I prosecuted the search, and I listened to her and went back to school. But, I did not forget my oath. We never obtained a clew to the burglars, and as I was not able to procure first class detectives, I was compelled to nurse my revenge and see the years drift by without striking a blow for vengeance. I felt, however, that my time would come. A thrill shot through me when I read that strange letter from Virginia City. I knew at once that it referred to the villain who killed my father on the stairs. I resolved to go at once. I never thought who 'Placer' might be—I felt that he could not be an enemy—and a week afterward I landed in Virginia City eager to corral the wildcat mentioned by my strange correspondent. I had some money left, and I discovered that Virginia City is full of hands ready to rob and kill for an ounce of gold. I had stepped from the teacher's desk into a den of lions. My first move was to find Placer. In a city where almost every man has a nickname, I found that a person—an old miner—called Placer Pandey who had frequented the rough resorts of Virginia City all winter—had taken his departure. From what I learned of the man I was satisfied that he was my unknown helper, but he was beyond my reach. I resolved to remain and await his return. I was told that he came and went at odd seasons, and I hoped that fortune would bring us together. But I waited in vain. My little wealth dwindled away, and I became known as Dictionary Nat by the men who frequent the dens to which I went often in hopes of finding Placer Pandey. One night I was drawn into a quarrel which was gotten up, as I thought, for the express purpose of robbing me. The instigator was Revelation Rube, but in the melee that followed I was forced to knock him down to save myself, when a stranger hurried me out of the den and whispered in my ears these words: 'The Wildcat came nigh corraling you to-night, Dictionary. Be keeful.' I was then left alone. Was that man Placer Pandey?"

"The next day I found myself quite a hero, and the people said that Revelation Rube had fled, disgusted at having been knocked down by 'a boy.' I resolved to follow him, for the words whispered in my ears after the fight had, as I believed, thrown me on the right trail at last. When a rumor reached my ears that Revelation Rube was in the vicinity of Cinnamon City I started in pursuit. I am here. You know the rest."

The story had been told, and Bill Bravo and his bears had listened to every word. "Then revenge brought you into these diggin's?" the young bear-tamer said. "Revenge and that only. In our quarrel Revelation Rube said that he would post me for a white-livered Yankee school-teacher wherever he went."

"That's no disgrace," ejaculated Bill. "I wish you could l'arn me an' my b'ars one-half what you know. Now, I kin go down to Cinnamon with my eyes open. You hev no idea who Placer Pandey is?"

"Not the slightest. I never hired anybody to hunt father's assassin down. If Placer has helped me he must have played detective on his own hook. But why?"

"That's what time will tell, mebbe. I know Placer Pandey. He is one of them old miners what wants to be doin' suthin' mysterious all the time. They would call him a detective in some places, but, hyarabouts, nobody takes much notice of him. The next time you tackle Revelation Rube, boy, I'll be hangin' round, an' Dandy Dick an' his pard will not be far off."

The two huge grizzlies raised their heads, and each displayed a crimson cavern edged with horrid teeth.

"I am ready now," said Bill Bravo rising. "To-night we will find the one wild-cat you want, at Cinnamon. The young b'ars kin stay at home an' keep house. We'll take the big 'uns down for amusement."

Dictionary Nat did not hesitate, and a few moments later the den on the hillside was deserted, and two men and two grizzlies went down the mountain trail in the starlight.

Cinnamon City was scarcely four miles from Bravo's home, and, that distance soon traveled, the two pards halted in the darkened shadows of the shanties at the western limits of the town.

All at once a light flashed above the town, and then the sharp report of a revolver was heard and the flame disappeared.

"At their old tricks!" explained Bill. "They run a candle in a bottle to the top of a hundred foot pole an' then shoot at it, an'," he added in an impressive tone, "they say thet not a man ov Cinnamon hez ever failed to put out the light!"

Dictionary Nat did not reply, but allowed his lips to meet firmly.

"Kin you shoot like thet, Dictionary?" suddenly asked Bill. "I don't know," was the modest reply. "But I have practiced a good deal, although I never tried to shoot out a candle one hundred feet from the ground."

"Thar's a kind ov slight in candle winkin' I've always thought," answered the grizzly king. "Look! up whirls another! Crack! out she goes ag'in. The boys ar' hev'in' a holiday."

As Bill finished, the third spark of fire ran skyward, but at another report it suddedly disappeared.

Dictionary Nat looked on and said nothing.

CHAPTER III.
NAT INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

"MEBBE," remarked Bill Bravo after a moment's silence, "mebbe we'd better jine the party down thar without the b'ars. They'll come whenever I give the signal. Arter all, we mayn't want 'em to-night."

Nat did not object to this arrangement and when he and his new friend moved forward once more, Dandy Dick and Rocky Dan were crouching in the dark shadows of the shanties.

"Thar's nothin' like hev'in' the two big pards nigh," said the grizzly king as they went on.

Cinnamon City boasted of a public square not very large, but large enough, however, to contain the entire population of the town. It had been the scene of many desperate encounters between the lawless denizens of the mountain city, and the life blood of more than one man had stained its hard-tramped soil.

In the center of this plat rose a pole whose top was one hundred feet above ground. It had not been erected for the purpose of flying a flag, for the men of Cinnamon were not patriotic enough to fly a flag to the breeze; they had reared the pole for an entirely different purpose.

On the night, and at the hour of Nat Grayscot's arrival in the suburbs of the town, the pole was being put to the uses for which it had been erected. A motley crowd almost filled the square, throughout which flared mining lamps from poles stuck into the ground. These threw

a weird light over the scene, and revealed the fact that every man either held a revolver in his hand or displayed the butts of a brace above the top of his leathern belt.

"Thar's only five more candles left," called out a rough voice at the foot of the pole. "Who hezn't shot yet ov the Cherubs?"

"I hev'n't. I'm the last man," answered a tall, broad-shouldered and dark-bearded man stepping from a group of fellows of his ilk, and throwing back the hammer of a huge "navy."

"All right, Bowie Buck. Now git ready. The Tigers hev four shots on the Cherubs recollect. Ef you miss the candle they kin win by one p'int. Now, up she goes!"

As the speaker finished a spark of fire seemed to leap from his hand and run up the pole.

It was the candle in its bottle, the nocturnal target of the men of Cinnamon.

Bowie Buck kept his eye on the light until it stopped far overhead and hung in the heavens like a star, then his right hand went up, and at the crack of his revolver the light disappeared and a shower of shattered glass came downward.

A murmur of applause greeted this shot.

"Now fur the amateurs," cried out the man at the foot of the pole as he lit one of the four remaining candles. "This is a free-fur-all contest, boys, ez far as neither the Tigers nor the Cherubs ar' consarned. Atween them, to-night's shootin' seems to be a draw. Placer Pandey hez spoken fur one shot, an' hez planked down his fee. Whar is he?"

"Hyar!"

The monosyllable was followed by the appearance of a man on the vacant spot occupied by the marksmen when firing at the lighted bottle.

"I object to Placer's shootin' ez an amateur," suddenly cried a voice from the dense crowd. "Ef he wants to keep in practice why doesn't he jine one ov the clubs?"

With a curious smile and a flashing eye Placer Pandey turned slowly upon the man who had spoken.

The objector was one of his own build, six feet tall, with a Herculean frame and eyes as keen as an eagle.

"Why don't I jine one of the clubs, eh?" fell slowly from Placer Pandey's lips as the eyes of the twain met. "I prefer to shoot on my own hook, Revelation. Now, Daisy, run up the light."

"I object!" flashed the individual called Revelation, who stood at the head of the shooting club known as the Tigers.

Under the fist like mustache that covered his mouth, Placer Pandey bit his lip and seemed for a moment to have changed his mind about shooting at the candle, for he stepped back from the "scoring board" as if to make way for another marksman.

"We'll take Placer into the Cherubs right away," called out the rough voice of the bronzed leader of that organization. "Dangerous Dan leaves to-morrer, an' hez left the club, so we hev room fur Placer."

"Then he can't shoot to-night!" announced Revelation Rube, triumphantly.

Placer Pandey rejected the proffered election to the rights and privileges of the Cherub Shooting Club of Cinnamon, but his objections were overruled, and against his will he became a member of the organization. This prevented him from using his revolver on the candle that night, and seemed to nip in the bud a quarrel rapidly rising between himself and Revelation Rube.

Placer stepped back, but cast his eyes up at the candle burning at the top of the pole.

"Whar ar' the amateurs to-night?" called out the man who manipulated the ropes, in a derisive tone. "Must the four last candles go beggin', boys? Mebbe dollars are scarce? Down comes the light ef you all back out."

"I'll take a chance," said a voice directly behind Revelation Rube, and as the speaker stepped to the scoring board, he threw a silver dollar at the feet of the man at the pole.

Instantly every eye was turned upon the boyish figure which had appeared in the midst of the men of Cinnamon like an apparition. Men pressed forward with exclamations of surprise on their tongues, and one snatched one of the lamps from its pole and held it in the stranger's face in order that he might be inspected by all.

"Stan' back an' give the boy a show, men! He's paid his fee an' is entitled to his shot. He needn't give us his handle until he's sent his bullet to'ards ther candle. Don't crowd 'im to death! Stan' back thar an' give 'im elbow-room."

These words and commands had only partial effect. A few of the mystified men of Cinnamon drew back, but the larger half of the crowd, notably the Tigers, headed by Revelation Rube, held their ground if, indeed, they did not advance a few inches.

The new-comer—no less a person than Dictionary Nat—stood his ground, and even smiled at the curiosity of the ruffians by whom he was surrounded.

"By Jehu! it's ther yankee book-rat from Virginia City!" exclaimed Revelation Rube in an audible tone, which did not fail to reach Nat's ears, and cause him to send a quick glance at the speaker, and then, in a louder tone, he addressed the crowd: "Let's all stan' back, boys, an' see whether the youngster kin shoot."

"Give 'im a new candle, Daisy! Thet one up thar's most out," cried some one from among the Cherubs.

"No. I'll take my chances with the spark left up there," answered Nat Grayscot firmly. "I am ready to shoot."

"Then blaze away."

Up went the youth's revolver and a moment later its clear report rung out.

"He's a daisy, sure enough!" exclaimed several as the light went out.

"He can't do it ag'in! Give 'im another candle an' let 'im try."

"I have satisfied myself, men of Cinnamon," said Nat stepping back, but not before he had sent an arrow like glance full of triumph toward the spot where Revelation Rube stood. "I will shoot no more to-night."

"Mebbe he'll hev to try livin' targets afore he leaves Cinnamon," almost hissed Revelation, whose eyes seemed to emit sparks of living hatred. "He used to practice with the revolver at recess, I'll bet! Mebbe they used to shoot at candles in Illinoy?"

The last sentence went to Nat Grayscot's heart with a thrill that made him start.

How did Revelation Rube know that he used to teach school in Illinois?

"I never heard of candle-winking until to-night, sir," he said wheeling upon the captain of the Tigers. "I have met you before I believe in Virginia City. I trust you have recovered from that meeting."

There was an irony in Dictionary Nat's voice which darkened with a scowl the face of the man before him. His cutting allusion to his victory over Revelation Rube in the Virginia City faro den where he had actually knocked him down, was enough to arouse all the tigerism in the desperado's nature.

"See hyar, no insolence!" grated the bronze brute. "You hed better stayed whar I left you. This is an unhealthy locality fur book-rats, an' boys!"

"But the chap hez a right hyar ez long ez he behaves himself," interposed Placer Pandey as he threw his tall figure forward and halted almost directly between Nat and his insulter.

"Thet's so, Placer!" broke from the ranks of the Cherubs. "Boy er man, the stranger is got to hev a fair show."

Rube looked at the stalwart men who stood behind him. He was eager for a fight, but for the present the Tigers seemed to sympathize with Nat.

"Make 'im show his grit over the devil's dram!" was whispered in Rube's ear from behind. "If his sand is ez good ez his shot war, he'll prove no baby to tackle."

"All right!" said Rube, answering Placer Pandey, and the men who backed him. "But the chap must set 'em up afore we give 'im the freedom ov Cinnamon. Thet's the law for all."

No objection was made to these remarks.

Nat, who saw that he was caught in a snare, turned round and asked in a loud tone for a drinking-place.

"All aboard fur Idaho Ike's!" chorused fifty voices, and the crowd began to rush toward a saloon whose doors stood invitingly ajar at one side of the square.

Revelation Rube turned away with a glare of savage triumph under his bushy lashes.

Nat did not hesitate to follow the stream already pouring over the threshold of the largest den in Cinnamon. He threw his glance through the crowd, but did not see Bill Bravo.

"He'll turn up when I need him," he said, to himself. "And I may want him very soon."

The next moment he felt the fingers of a huge hand close on his arm, but could not make out the features of the man, for he was just then crossing a darkened space.

"Don't go too fast, pard," was said. "They ar' goin' to mix the devil's dram fur ye at

Ike's. I advise you to take it down ef it ar' a nasty dose. You mustn't give Revelation Rube a pretext fur gittin' his work in to-night in Cinnamon whar he rules the roost. I'm Placer Pandey. You've heard from me."

Dictionary Nat started, but did not reply.

He had discovered his correspondent at last, and from that moment he felt stronger and safer, for Placer Pandey and his revolvers were near at hand.

The next minute he crossed the threshold of Idaho Ike's uninviting den.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEVIL'S DRAM.

IDAHO IKE had built his saloon with a view of accommodating at one time the entire population of Cinnamon. The interior was commodious and furnished with rough benches and tables, the latter not covered with the proverbial green cloth.

At Dictionary Nat's heels, as he entered the place, trod Placer Pandey, the man whose rough scrawl had drawn him into the strange situation, in which he then was.

"Hyar's the chap!" greeted Nat's appearance, but without noticing the thirsty and curious crowd ranged along a chalk line which Idaho Ike had just drawn on the rough pine floor before the counter, he said quietly:

"What will you have, boys?"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Revelation Rube. "We'll take whisky ov course; but ther young gentleman must show his pluck by drinkin' ther initiation dram. Mix it up fur 'im, Ike, and straights fur the boys."

Nat stepped back a foot in order to better watch the manufacture of the drink which Placer Pandey had designated the devil's dram, and when he halted he found himself at the miner's elbow.

"Gulp 'er down an' never wink," whispered Placer. "If you want to win in the end, swaller the insult to-night."

"I may," was the response.

Meanwhile the barkeeper was emptying into a large-sized glass which stood on the counter a little of the contents of the various bottles that decorated his shelves. Visible smiles came to the faces of the spectators as he proceeded, and when he broke an egg into the glass and emptied upon it a quantity of cayenne pepper from an ancient-looking castor, all eyes were turned to the youth.

"Thar's yer medicine!" announced Ike, pushing the mixture toward Nat, who stepped forward and took up the glass with the steadiest of nerves.

"Drink 'er down ef you hev the grit!" hissed Revelation Rube, but his eyes said plainly: "Drink the mess or fight!"

Nobody watched Nat's movements with more solicitude than Placer Pandey. The miner took a strange interest in the youth, and when Revelation Rube spoke he shot that worthy a glance which at any other time might have been followed by the crack of the deadly revolver.

"He's goin' to take the dose!" went through the crowd as the glass approached Nat's lips. "He hesn't the grit ov a louse, ef he does know how to pink ther candle."

A moment later, or just as the young avenger's nostrils caught a whiff of the disgusting mixture, he sprang back and raised the devil's dram high above his head.

His eyes flashed fire; his whole frame quivered with excitement.

"You can mix, but you can't make me drink!" he exclaimed. "If to refuse to taste this villainous decoction is to fight—I fight!"

Down came the glass, to be shattered to atoms on the floor at Revelation Rube's feet, and Dictionary Nat stood before the crowd with a cocked revolver in each hand!

"He's sp'iled it all," groaned Placer Pandey, starting back. "The chap's got more grit than discretion; thet's jes' what Rube wanted 'im to do."

For a moment the entire crowd seemed paralyzed by Nat's action. They drew back from the running mixture as though it was a serpent crawling toward them.

All but Revelation Rube, from whose belt had leaped a revolver, which his right hand cocked in the dead silence which had followed the crash of the glass.

"Gentlemen, I was to treat you," said the youth. "Name your drinks. I will drink with you, but not the devil's dram. That's only for hogs!"

Not a man moved, not a voice answered.

Placer Pandey's hand was once more at Nat's sleeve, but the youth gently disengaged his arm from its touch.

"Let me alone," his action said.
"Mix up the same dram once more, Ike. We'll give 'im another trial," suddenly broke forth Revelation Rube, whose face rage had almost blackened. "The white-livered book-rat doesn't understand the consequences!"

"I do understand them!" retorted Nat. "You will mix up another dram at the expense of your liquor and glasses. I will break and spill so long as you mix."

"Then, youngster, you've got to fight Revelation Rube."

Almost before the sound of his own name had left the desperado's tongue, up went the young adventurer's revolvers.

"Riddle the bloodless chap!" "Make a lead mine out of 'im!" rung through the den.

The excitement was intense. Nat Grayscot heard the ominous click, click of revolver-locks on every side.

The Cherubs, headed by a man named Wild-cat Carl, were behind him; Revelation Rube and the Tigers, the rival shooting club, were in his front.

"I didn't hit the candle by accident, gentlemen," came sternly over the two revolvers held steadily in Nat's outstretched hands. "I shall certainly kill the man who lifts a pistol against me, and Revelation Rube especially. I came to Cinnamon in the interest of justice, and am able to protect myself."

"Back out!" was whispered behind him. "The way to ther door is open. You're brave enough to b'long to ther Cherubs."

Nat did not move.

"Take 'im out!" ordered the same voice, this time in a tone of command.

A hand fell on each of Dictionary Nat's shoulders.

He was forced back.

At the same time the men who had been held at bay by his revolvers advanced, and a dozen weapons looked him in the face.

Suddenly a loud report filled the room.

Nat heard the whizz of the bullet and the terrible thud occasioned by it striking some one just behind him.

One of the Cherubs had been hit.

Dictionary Nat tried to free himself, but strong arms solicitous for his safety hustled him toward the door.

"Exterminate the book-rat!" shouted the Tigers, springing forward, but Placer Pandey threw himself before Nat and covered his forced retreat.

All at once those nearest the door started back with wild cries, and the next second were reversing the tide of retreat.

"A b'ar! a grizzly!" echoed everywhere.

An enormous grizzly had sprung over the threshold, to be followed half a minute later by his counterpart, and suddenly between them appeared the athletic figure of a handsome man whose hands clutched the arbiters of the wild West—revolvers.

The entire crowd, Cherubs and Tigers, now strangely intermingled, drew back from this startling spectacle, and as Nat's would-be-preservers were frightened with the rest, he was left alone before Bill Bravo and his bears.

"It ar' Bill an' his b'ars!" cried Revelation Rube, the first to recover. "We giv 'im orders to keep out ov town, but he's hyar with his pards to help the book-rat what wouldn't swaller the devil's dram. Draw, boys, Cherubs an' all, an' let us wipe out Bill an' his brutes!"

Rube's command was an unnecessary one, for every hand in the room seemed to clutch a revolver.

"For'ard, pards!" called out Bill, in a low tone to his bears. "Now, men of Cinnamon, thar ar' Dandy Dick an' Rocky Dan. Pull a trigger on 'em ef you dare."

The desperadoes hesitated.

"Come hyar, Dictionary," ordered Bill.

Nat obeyed.

"Go out an' wait fur me at the pole in the squar'."

"No. I am going to stand by you."

"Go out, I say! I command it, Dictionary. We ar' pards, you know."

Bill Bravo moved slightly to one side, and Nat, catching his eye at that moment, passed between him and the bears, and sprung from the den.

A howl of rage followed his escape, and a rush might have been made after him if two revolvers and a brace of grizzlies had not blocked the path.

Nat hesitated just beyond the door. To seek the pole in the middle of the square looked too much like deserting Bill and his friend Placer Pandey.

"You must obey the bear-tamer," suddenly

said a voice at his side. "You are not safe here. Revelation Rube has been hoping that you would follow him to Cinnamon."

These words spoken in an anxious tone, full of silvery sweetness, held Dictionary Nat entranced until the last sentence was finished.

He was looking into the upturned face of a beautiful young girl.

"Who are you?" came almost unconsciously to the youth's lips.

"I don't know, but they call me Posy Nell.

But, go to the pole and then back to Virginia City. The Tigers are against you, and Bill Bravo, his bears and the Cherubs are powerless to save. Revelation Rube wants your blood for something, I don't know what. He told me a good deal about you the other day—"

"Then you—"

The girl's eyes fell.

"I belong to him, I guess," she said. "That is, he brought me over the mountains when I was a child. I don't want them to kill you. You must go."

"To the pole, yes; from the country, never!" cried Nat. "Answer me one question first: Are you satisfied with your lot?"

"There! you mustn't ask me that," was the reply.

"We'll meet again, then."

"It might not be best."

Nat bounded away.

CHAPTER V.

THE THEFT OF A CORPSE.

THAT portion of the square immediately around the pole was deserted when Nat reached it.

A few pieces of candles and many particles of glass lay at his feet. The latter glistened like diamonds.

"Why did I come hither?" he asked himself.

"Just because Bill Bravo told me to leave the den, I deserted him in the face of a mob. What if he kills Revelation Rube while I wait here? That would be taking long delayed vengeance out of my hands. He must not harm that man, for he belongs to me! There! that was the crack of a revolver. I will not stay here. My place is at the side of the grizzly king—not here, idle though armed while they fight down yonder!"

Dictionary Nat moved impulsively from the pole. One of his revolvers was clutched in his right hand.

"Ah! you are not keeping your promise!" said a voice from behind. "I was afraid you would break it."

Nat turned and saw the figure of Posy Nell in the starlight.

"It is you, is it?" he exclaimed, springing toward the girl, who instead of standing still seemed to shrink away. "Do you not think I am needed down yonder? That pistol-shot may have ended my friend's career."

"It did not. I can tell you this," was the reply. "On the contrary Bill Bravo sent a bullet whizzing through a Tiger's brain. They hesitate to attack him and his grizzlies. He is facing the mob. Stay here; he will retreat in good order. I saw him shoot, and I knew you would be anxious to know the result so I came here at once."

Nat Grayscot was deeply impressed with the interest the beauty of Cinnamon City was taking in his welfare.

"Do you know whom Bill Bravo has slain?" he asked.

"I do not."

"He may have killed Revelation Rube."

"With his secret? No! no!" cried the girl.

"Then he keeps a secret from you?"

"Yes. I do not know who I am, but I have told you this before. Revelation Rube knows. That is his secret. I would remain Posy Nell always if the bear king shot him down."

"And I would be forced to go back baffled," added Nat.

The girl was silent for a moment.

"You have filled my heart with fears," she said almost suddenly as she looked up into the youth's face. "I wouldn't have Revelation Rube killed at this time for all the gold in these mountains. I am going to see for myself. Will you not stay here? I don't want you to fall into the hands of Revelation's men."

Nell's tone was so imploring that Nat could hardly summon courage enough to resist.

She was deserting him when a clear voice came across the square.

"Men ov Cinnamon," said that voice, "from to-night thar's eternal war between us! Me an' my pard expect no quarter; we shall give none. You kin bury yer pard an' hold an indignation meetin' over the grave. I'll not be hard to find

when you want me, an' Rocky Dan and Dandy Dick will not be far off. Jes' call round when you hev bizness ov importance to transact with Bill Bravo, King of the Grizzlies. My new pard kin shoot, fur didn't he wink the candle at the top ov the pole? Ef you hed looked cl'ar down into his eye you would hev seen aforehand that you war offerin' ther devil's dram to ther wrong man. Men ov Cinnamon, I toss you good-night."

Dictionary Nat and Posy Nell heard every word.

The voice told them that Bill Bravo had withdrawn from the rum-hole, and that he stood once more in the starlight, in front of it.

"Your friend is safe!" said the girl to the youth; "but the man who has kept the secret of my life so well may be lying dead in Idaho Ike's saloon."

"I hope not," was all Nat could say.

Half a minute later the figures of a man and two bears became visible, and Bill Bravo halted in front of Nat.

"Hyar you ar', Dictionary," he exclaimed. "I have roused the animals, but I hed to kill one afore I could control 'em."

"Whom did you kill, sir?"

The bear-man whirled upon the speaker, and the next second he was looking down into Posy Nell's face. Her eyes seemed to flash, and there was a menace at the corners of her mouth.

"Rube's gal, by hokey!" cried Bill, as he glanced from Nell to Nat. "She's one ov them flowers thet you don't find everywhere in the Rockies."

Nell's hand fell on Bill's arm. "I asked you a question," she persisted sternly, "whom did you kill?"

"Not your pectorator, my beauty," was the answer. "The fellar I laid out war called Karl the Killer. Kind o' Injun, warn't he?"

"Yes," responded Nell, with gratefulness.

"You war fearin' I hed dropped Rube, eh? I left him fur Dictionary hyar."

The girl looked into Nat's face.

"You must not forget that he carries a secret in his breast," she said. "He must not perish with it there. He shall not!"

Nat might have made another promise if Bill Bravo had not clutched his arm.

"Make the gal no rash promises," he whispered. "You might hev to break every one afore long. It's war to the knife from this minute. You made friends to-night an' many an enemy. The Cherubs made you a member ov the'r club, didn't they?"

"Yes."

"They ar' yer friends, boy, but the other club—the Tigers—"

"Are my enemies."

"They ar' fur a fact, an' they ar' tigers in more than name. Let us be off now. The b'ars hear suthin'."

"So do I," assured Nell. "I have seen figures moving over yonder."

"Back to the Retreat fur the present," Bill commanded.

"Yes, go!"

Nat held out his hand to the girl, who touched it with more than a passing interest. Their eyes met, spoke silently, and thus they separated.

A moment later the place was deserted. The two pards were leaving Cinnamon City, and Posy Nell was hastening down the street that ran past Idaho Ike's den.

Just as she reached the front of the saloon she saw two men carrying a human body through the wide doorway.

"It is the man Bill Bravo shot—Karl the Killer," she murmured, as she hurried on as if eager to escape observation.

Not far away stood the rough structure which she called home—a rather large cabin with two rooms.

"I've given orders fur 'em to bring Karl to my shanty," said the voice of Revelation Rube, as Nell was about to enter the house. "He war one ov my men, an' I'm goin' to see thet he ar' decently planted."

"Hedn't we better git word to the Injuns?" asked another voice. "They more 'n half claim Karl fer cap'n."

"No! We don't want the reddies to mix in our fight. They'll scent the carkiss soon enough. Why didn't you fellars drop Bill when he stood between his b'ars?"

Nell could hear no reply.

"I guess he held the trump cards," continued Revelation Rube, with a low chuckle. "It war a cold deck he set up on us to-night, Dave. But jest wait till we hev planted Karl. Then the pards an' the b'ars will surrender the checks they've carried too long already."

"The Tigers will stand by you, cap'n."
 "I know that."
 "But the Cherubs—"
 "They made that white-livered boy a pard jes' to rile us," was the grated interruption.
 "I know Placer Pandey. He must go down in the general wreck. He's follered me too long already."

"Follered you, Rube?"
 "Like a bloodhound. He thinks I never noticed it, but I hev'n't been asleep."

"What hez Placer got ag'in' you?"
 "More than you could dream out in a week's solid sleep, Dave," assured Revelation Rube in a tone of mystification. "Ah! hyar comes the corpse. We needn't be hyar. Ther boys know whar to put Karl."

The two, who were a short distance to the right of the cabin, moved away, and Posy Nell, instead of entering, drew back from the door and followed them.

She therefore did not see the two Tigers carry the corpse of Bill's victim into the house.

She was anxious to hear more of the conversation which Revelation Rube had terminated so abruptly, and it was for this purpose that she glided after her "protector" and his friend.

But they did not enlighten her further, for they joined a group of companions before Idaho Ike's, and held a kind of indignation meeting on the square.

Nell went back to the cabin.

She had prepared herself for finding the corpse of Karl the Killer stretched on the floor, but she had not dreamed of meeting an Indian on the threshold.

The girl drew back from the door with an exclamation of surprise, and a yard away stared at the arrow-like figure of the brave who had just emerged from the cabin.

"Karl the Killer is dead, Mountain Rose!" said the Indian, angrily, and then before Nell could reply: "Him more red-man than white. Him go back to the tribe."

"His friends are going to bury him here," the girl answered.

"No! Black Feather strong enough to carry him to the camp down in the big valley. Him take 'im away now. Mountain Rose must keep her tongue still."

The stalwart Sioux turned back into the cabin, before which Posy Nell stood more than half bewildered.

Should she raise the alarm and prevent the red-skin from carrying out his purpose? Karl the Killer was not a weighty personage physically, and the girl knew that Black Feather, who was by no means a stranger in Cinnamon City, was capable of bearing the body away.

She was still undecided when the Indian reappeared at the door with the body in his arms.

"Black Feather got his brother, Mountain Rose," he exclaimed, triumphantly. "The wolves what killed him shall perish. The whole tribe will hunt 'em down. Karl was killed in the white man's town. The fire shall eat it up."

Nell did not tell the Indian that Karl the Killer had not fallen by the hand of a man of Cinnamon.

"The young man has enemies enough already," she said to herself. "I don't want the Sioux to hunt him, too."

She did not resist the abduction of the body, but stood aside and saw Black Feather bear it toward the Indian camp, which was not far away.

She then entered the cabin and retired to the little sleeping apartment to the left of the door. But the girl could not rest.

"Fate must have brought us face to face," she averred, time and again. "I wish he had not come into this country; but he is here, and we have met. He and Rube are enemies, and the secret that Revelation carries may be unspoken forever. Nat Grayscot did not promise me that he would not strike until Rube had revealed the story of my life. He was about to do so, but the bear-man checked him. I hate Bill Bravo for that. Now the Indians have come upon the scene. There will be terrible times from this night. And all because Nat Grayscot hates Revelation Rube."

The young girl paused almost abruptly, for the cabin door had been dashed open, and she heard an exclamation of surprise, and then a mad oath.

"Nell, whar ar' you?"

The girl started, then flung herself down on the couch—she had been seated at a little window—and pretended to be fast asleep.

The next instant Revelation Rube sprung into the room, and almost lifted her from the bed.

"Whar's Karl?" he demanded, holding her at

arm's length while he glared at her with a tiger's ferocity. "Don't shake yer head an' say you don't know. I want the truth, Nelly—the bottom facts. Now, whar's Karl?"

"You must ask Black Feather."

At mention of the Indian's name an oath shot from Revelation Rube's throat, and she fell from his grasp.

"The buzzards found the carkiss afore we looked fur 'em," he muttered. "Go back to bed, Nelly. You couldn't keep the Injun from totin' Karl off. You're more precious to me to-night than you ever war since I've protected you. They sha'n't tear you from Revelation Rube ez long ez he kin touch a trigger er handle the bowie!"

The girl's eyes dilated.

Who were seeking to separate her from the captain of the Tigers?

"The youngster don't want you, Nelly, because he's never seen you," Rube explained in reply to her look. "The man what hez been my shadder fur fifteen years ar' closin' in on me—fur what?—to furnish the mountain vultures with a squar' meal. You're not goin' to change masters now, girl. I could sell you fur a million, but my enemy—the old one, I mean—sha'n't tear you from this shanty!"

Nell was alone again.

CHAPTER VI.

REVELATION RUBE'S REVENGE.

BILL BRAVO spoke but little during the journey back to the mountain cave, nor did Nat care to break the silence.

The two bears trotted along the trail ahead of them, and were the first to enter the den.

A moment later the four cubs rushed from their corner and greeted the quartette with many ludicrous demonstrations of joy.

"Wal, Dictionary, what do you think?" suddenly said Bill, turning to his friend in the firelight, and laying his hand on his shoulder.

"What do I think of what, Bill?—Cinnamon City?"

"No; ther gal—Posy Nell."

"She is pretty."

"Ov course."

"And brave?"

"Ez a lion."

"But she's a slave."

"Whose?"

"Revelation Rube's."

"She told you, then?"

"In one brief sentence. What you do know about her?"

A smile brightened the bear-tamer's eyes.

"Forgettin' Rube a'ready?" laughed Bill.

"You've met yer destiny, Dictionary! When you first told me you war on ther road to Cinnamon I said to myself—'Fate ar' bringin' the two face to face.' What do I know about the gal? Not ez much ez she told you, I expect. I've seen 'er off an' on fur a few years, thet's about all. She is the only woman in Cinnamon worth a bowie. Rube appears to think a good deal ov Nell, an' it's ther only redeemin' trait the catamount's got."

"Is his affection sincere?" asked Nat.

"I think so."

"She isn't his child?"

"Ov course she isn't. Thar's bluer blood in her veins than ever run through his. She's a lily, he is dog-fennel—thet's about the difference, Dictionary. But, look hyar. I'm goin' down into ther valley. I saw a light down thar ez we came up. Dandy Dick saw it, too, for he guv me a knowin' look, but didn't let on. You kin stay hyar with the cubs an' Rocky Dan. I'll be back afore you're half through thinkin' ov the Lily of Cinnamon. Come, Dandy!"

The huge grizzly obeyed his master's call, and the twain left the cave together.

Nat threw himself down on the ground at the edge of the firelight, and reviewed his journey since leaving the school which he had deserted at Placer Pandey's summons to hasten to vengeance.

He had found new friends and new enemies—the former true, perhaps, the latter deadly.

While thus engaged with his thoughts in the cave, the youth did not dream of the scenes to which Bill Bravo and the grizzly were hastening.

The bear-tamer had not been mistaken when he said he had seen the reflection of a camp-fire in the valley. He soon stood above the fire gazing down into an Indian camp that held perhaps fifty Sioux, who looked like a marauding party. The entire gang was well armed, but Bill did not see any horses, which omission seemed to puzzle him.

On a certain spot where the firelight revealed everything lay some object covered with a

blanket. The bear-tamer had scarcely noticed this when one of the Indians threw the cover back and revealed the body of a man.

"Karl the Killer!" ejaculated Bill. "The men ov Cinnamon gave him back to the Injuns, who allus claimed thet he war more Sioux than white man. Ef he had stayed with his own, an' not tied himself to Rube's band, he might be breathin' yet. But he war too eager to stop one ov my bullets, warn't he, Dandy?"

The grizzly looked into his master's face and showed his teeth good-naturedly.

The bear-man was soon to discover that Revelation Rube and his followers had not given Karl the Killer back to the tribe of his adoption.

Into the light sprung suddenly an athletic Indian.

"Black Feather," cried Bill Bravo, at sight of the Sioux. "I once put an end to the play ov Mazeppa which the Crows war playin' with him, but he's forgotten the little circumstance."

While the bear-tamer spoke Black Feather halted beside the corpse of Karl the Killer. The other Indians instantly surrounded him.

"Suthin's up. They're goin' to hunt down the man what sent Karl down the narrow trail. Dandy, we are in fur it now."

The following moment Black Feather began to address the assembled Indians. He told them how he had entered Cinnamon to see two men carrying the corpse of their adopted brother into Revelation Rube's cabin, and how he had entered it and stolen the body for burial by the tribe.

Then came the terrible denunciation. Black Feather played well the part of a red Antony over the body of Bill Bravo's victim. He roused the Indians until cries of rage and vengeance made the valley ring.

"All thet means me!" said the auditor above the camp.

Not suddenly Black Feather announced the names of the men who were to pay for the death of Karl the Killer. He knew every man in Cinnamon, the town built on the best hunting-grounds possessed by the Sioux.

"To the wooden wigwams of the white wolves!" cried Black Feather. "They have sent Karl to the Great Spirit, and that after he had lived with them. The chief of the Tigers has reddened his hands with our brother's blood. Let not a wolf escape! Let the light of the burning lodges blacken the sky, and by and by where they now stand the red-man will once more watch for the buck, and stand face to face with the mountain grizzly! Our brother's blood is on the hands of every person with a white face. The Great Spirit tells Black Feather that the sun need not shine on the lodges of the gold-hunters. If the Indians listen not to his voice he may visit them with a plague before Karl the Killer rots in his grave. Will the Sioux go and strike the blow?"

Need we record the wild answer which was one prolonged shout for revenge?

The Indians acted like fiends.

They executed a grotesque dance around the corpse, while they gave vent to sundry cries which would have driven fear into hearts less brave than Bill Bravo's.

The listener knew that at the conclusion of the dance the Indians would take up their march for Cinnamon.

"Fifty bloodhounds like thet crowd in Cinnamon will make an ash-heap and a grave-yard out ov it afore mornin'," he said. "They will baffle ther youngster, an' kill Posy Nell. They will prevent me from hevin' a fair fight with the men ov Cinnamon. Ther town must be warned. Come, Dandy! We must try to save some ov ther men what would kill us on sight."

Bill Bravo and his companion withdrew from the scene rapidly coming to an end.

"I'll take ther Retreat in on my way to Cinnamon," he said, turning into a narrow trail that led to the mountain cave.

A few minutes later he and Dandy Dick the bear entered at the door-like opening.

"Back ag'in, Dictionary! Whar ar' ye?"

There was no reply.

"Dictionary, I say?" in a louder tone. "We've got hot, hard work afore us."

At that moment the grizzly which had accompanied him emerged from the darkened recesses of the cavern carrying in his mouth the carcass of one of the four cubs.

"What does this mean?" almost gasped Bill Bravo springing forward as Dandy Dick dropped his burden on the ground and looked up into his master's face with an almost human moan. "Who's stooped so low ez to kill one of the babies?"

He was kneeling over the cub whose forehead had been perforated by a pistol-bullet, and whose throat had been horribly gashed by a bowie-knife.

"Did you do this, Dictionary?" he flashed, springing erect. "No! no! you wouldn't harm the cubs. Revelation Rube an' his pards hev made a raid on my home! Why warn't I hyar? Blood shall flow for this! Whar ar' Dictionary an' the rest of the b'ars?"

Dandy Dick who had retired partly answered the question. The old grizzly stood before Bill with another dead cub in his mouth.

"Mebbe Dictionary an' the rest ov 'em ar' back thar!" cried Bill, snatching a burning stick from the fire and turning toward the back part of the cavern.

Forty feet from the fire he came suddenly upon the other two cubs lying side by side dead. That was all he saw at that moment.

"Black Feather an' his devils kin go to Cinnamon now, without hevin' me ahead ov 'em!" fell in hisses from Bill's lips. "Now, if we only knew whar Dictionary an' Rocky Dan war, Dandy; ef—"

He had glanced up at the wall before him and broken his own sentence.

Scrawled on its whitened surface in great letters was this brief sentence. It seemed to stare at him:

"How do you like our work, killer ov Karl?"
REVELATION AND PARDS."

"I'll answer that question by an' by!" fell madly from Bill Bravo's lips. "Mebbe afore mornin' ef I kin find you, Revelation."

He turned away and threw his torch back into the fire as he sprung across the floor of the main cavern.

The bear was at his heels.

Down the mountain path he went like a mad-man.

"Jes' in time, Dandy!" he said to the bear as he halted at the foot of the ascent. "The Injuns ar' on the road to Cinnamon. Can't we reinforce ther gang?"

Not a minute later he stepped boldly into the moonlight that illuminated the Cinnamon City trail, and faced the red avengers at whose head marched the stalwart figure of Black Feather.

"Halt!"

The word was unnecessary; the Indians had already recoiled.

"You ar' goin' to Cinnamon; so am I!" continued Bill Bravo. "Ther men ov ther town hev killed my little Dandy Dicks. I mean bizness. Refuse to let me march at Black Feather's side, an' I'll begin to kill hyar. Dandy will get his work in, too, an' the sun will see Cinnamon with all its houses unburned, arter all. What do you say pards?"

The position assumed by the bear-tamer was a menace. He stood boldly erect, with his head thrown back, and with a cocked revolver in each hand.

"To Cinnamon behind me, er death hyar—which do you choose?" shot over the weapons. "We kin be pards fur to-night. Arter that you kin hunt Bill Bravo all ther rest ov yer lives. Black Feather hez furgotten the man what shot the Crow horse when he war playin' Mazeppa."

A cry of recognition pealed from the Sioux's throat, and he leaped forward regardless of the mountaineer's revolvers.

"Black Feather has not forgotten! He has often hunted for the white man who shot the horse."

"To scalp 'im, eh, chief? But, never mind. I go with you now to Cinnamon, don't I?"

"White brother shall march beside Black Feather to vengeance!"

"I thought my revolvers an' a glimpse at the past would bring you to terms," said Bill, stepping to Black Feather's side.

The marching signal was then given, and the avengers sped along the trail once more.

Though shoulder to shoulder with Black Feather, the grizzly king did not let one of the Indians' movements escape his eye.

"I wouldn't be safe a second hyar ef the Injuns knowed who wiped Karl the Killer out. They'll know afore long. It wouldn't do to tell 'em now."

CHAPTER VII.

VENGEANCE FOR THE BABY BEARS.

THE brutal butchery of the four young bears had transformed Bill Bravo into a demon and prevented him from carrying out his intention of warning Cinnamon City of the approach of Karl the Killer's avengers.

He believed that Revelation Rube and his followers had returned to the mountain town, and imagined them at Idaho Ike's relating to an admiring crowd the story of the massacre.

"Of course they're all thar!" he averred more than once to himself. "I kin hear Rube tellin' the story now. The Tigers stan' around 'im an' Ike ar' fillin' the glasses fur the twentieth time at Rube's expense."

The bear-tamer's fancy on this occasion was not far astray, for Revelation Rube and his pards had returned to Cinnamon from their visit to Bill's mountain home.

Idaho Ike's was as usual well filled with its old frequenters, and the observed of all observers was the chief of the Tigers, who, with hat thrown back, was leaning against the counter from which he was telling the story of the "cleanin' out" of Bravo's retreat.

Just outside the shanty, and among the shadows at the door, stooped, or rather crouched, a girlish figure.

Posy Nell, the narrator's ward, was listening to the roughly-told story as it fell from Revelation's lips. Her eyes wore an anxious expression, and her cheeks were entirely colorless.

"He was not content with escaping with his life when the bear man and his bears were here a short time ago, but he must go away and by one mad act seal his doom!" Nell murmured.

"Bill Bravo has sworn vengeance before this. He will hunt Revelation down and pistol him. Then I will never be anybody else than Posy Nell, of Cinnamon, for with Rube would perish the secret I want to possess."

The girl did not know that at that moment the man she wished a thousand miles from Cinnamon was nearing it at the head of fifty Sioux warriors, bent on the destruction of Revelation Rube and his comrades.

When the Tiger's story had been narrated, Nell glided from the spot, and was crossing the square when a figure darted to her side and she felt a hand on her arm.

"You back here?" she exclaimed, staring into the face plainly visible in the moonlight.

"Yes, I am back, Nell. Do you know what is about to happen?"

"No," said the girl, almost unconsciously.

"A band of Indians threaten to attack Cinnamon."

"Indians attack Cinnamon!" was the echo in an incredulous tone. "Oh, I recall Black Feather's words. He did threaten the city when he carried Karl the Killer off. Where are they?"

"They cannot be a mile from the town."

"And you are here for the purpose of warnin' us?"

"Partly."

"I thank you, but Revelation must not find you here. He was disappointed to-night; you know that. He would not thank you for the warning you have brought. Instead of thanks, you might get a pistol-bullet in your head. Where is your friend?"

"I do not know. He left me in the cave awhile after we had returned to it for the purpose of inquiring into the meaning of a light somewhere in the valley. As he did not return as soon as I expected him I went out to find him. The bear, Rocky Dan, went along. We saw no light and then I surmised that my companion had come back here for a purpose. On the trail the bear suddenly deserted me, and I lost my way for awhile but recovered it. I saw the Indians on the march and heard their threats. They do not intend to spare a single life in Cinnamon City."

"They shall spare one!" cried Nell, with resolution.

"Yours?"

"No; Revelation Rube's!"

Dictionary Nat started back.

"He is the only man in Cinnamon whom I hate," he said. "The rest hate me. You must not be here when the Indians come. They may be at the edge of the town at this moment."

"Then the men of Cinnamon shall be warned at once!"

Posy Nell broke from Nat's loose grasp and started toward Idaho Ike's.

"I will go along," the youth decided.

"You must not!" she exclaimed, halting.

"Your life wouldn't be worth an ounce of dust in the glare of Idaho's lamps. Rube and his pards would riddle you with bullets."

"You talk to stone now," was the reply.

"The men of Cinnamon must be warned you say. I agree to it. Come on."

Dictionary Nat sprung across the square, followed by the frightened girl, whose fingers strove in vain to clutch his sleeve and detain him.

"I will spare Revelation awhile, for your sake, girl—and for the secret," he said. "Then he shall fall before my revolver. I have longed for the time when I could stand face to face

with the man who struck that cowardly blow five years ago. I have found him. He is surrounded by a band of men, tigers in more than name; but what do I care?"

"Halt thar, youngsters!" suddenly cried a voice, as a man stepped in front of the pair.

"It is Placer Pandey, the Captain of the Cherubs," whispered Nell.

The young couple had halted before the old miner, who seemed to have risen from the ground.

"You hev'n't got the least idea ov corralin' a wildcat, boy?" said Placer, addressing Nat. "Thar ar' forty revolvers at Ike's waitin' fur you. When I writ you that I hed found the man you wanted, I didn't expect you'd leave yer jedgment in Illinoy."

"But you do not know that Black Feather and his braves, crazed by the death of Karl, are at the edge of the city!" cried Posy Nell.

"They ar', ar' they?" returned Placer, fixing his eyes on the girl who was eager to rush forward and warn the inmates of Idaho Ike's den. "My little gal, they might kill you in the me-lee."

"They swear to butcher all, and burn the city!"

Placer Pandey's eyes began to flash.

"Thet includes the Cherubs!" he said. "Ef it didn't do thet, I wouldn't keer so much. I'd more'n half like to see the Injuns come. You two youngsters must git out ov the way ez quickly ez possible. I'll do the warnin' myself."

"No!" said Nell, firmly.

"You won't trust me, eh? You think I'd warn the Cherubs only?"

"You hate Revelation—I know that."

Placer Pandey stepped back a foot.

"Of course I hate him!" he responded, in a voice that made Nat Grayscot start. "I have cause for hating that man. I have dogged his footsteps for fifteen years, and now that I have tracked him to his den, I do not intend that he shall escape the penalty he owes to justice."

Nat and Nell uttered exclamations of surprise, for Placer Pandey had unconsciously thrown off a mask. He had dropped, as it were, his mining garb and rough dialect, which he had carried those fifteen years for a purpose.

"You forget," said Nat, recovering, "that I have a debt to cancel with that wretch."

"Then cancel it before—"

"Before you settle yours? I understand. I will cancel mine to-night—now!"

With the last word on his lips, Dictionary Nat, the young vengeance hunter, bounded toward the saloon, whose lights were visible from the spot where the trio stood.

Revelation Rube's ward strove to detain the youth, but a hand seized her arm and she was jerked back by the old miner.

"Let 'im go, Nelly," he said. "He won't find the settlin' ov his account an easy job."

"But the secret!"

A strange light came into Placer's eyes.

"Let us go to Revelation's cabin or somewhere else. I want to tell you somethin', Nelly. The Injuns ain't so nigh arter all, an' what I know may interest you more than what will happen at Idaho's within the next ten minutes."

The tenor of the miner's voice, coupled to his looks, strangely interested the beauty of Cinnamon, and she scarcely resisted when he led her away.

She forgot for the time being the youth who, revolver in hand, was rushing toward the gambling den where Revelation Rube and his companions were planning a new campaign against the league of two which had been formed recently among the Rockies.

The door of the den stood wide open, and though the dials were pointing to morning, the place was well filled.

"Talk about Satan an' ye'll see his horns!" suddenly cried a bronzed fellow pointing toward the door. "The boy hez come back fur the dram he refused awhile ago. He's changed his notion."

Before the man had ceased to speak every eye in the den was fixed on the slender figure in the doorway.

"I am back!" grated Nat, lifting the weapon clutched by his right hand. "Let the man I want step forward and face the son of the man he slew in his own house, five years ago. Where is your captain, men of Cinnamon? Push the coward forward if he is afraid to show himself."

The mad eyes of Dictionary Nat could not catch sight of Revelation Rube's figure, for the men who stood between him and the captain of the Tigers.

Suddenly the crowd before him began to separate, and he caught a glimpse of a man surging forward.

"I'm no coward!" hissed the advancing person. "May I be killed by a baby if I hide from you! Hyar's Revelation Rube."

At that moment the last man who screened the desperado's figure stepped aside, and the next second Dictionary Nat staggered from the revolver that flashed in his face.

Quick and eager though he was, the eye of Revelation Rube had beaten him, and before he could cover the chief of the Tigers the enemy's revolver had spoken.

Nat fell on the ground just beyond the door.

"You didn't finish 'im, cap'n!" warned a man at Revelation's elbow.

"I will."

A single bound carried Nat's foe to the door. The crowd was at his heels.

The next instant a second shot might have been fired at the fallen man, who was attempting to rise, had not a stalwart man leaped between the two and two revolvers covered Revelation and his bronze backers.

"We ar' pards, dogs ov Cinnamon City! an' I am hyar to pay you fur the killin' ov the baby b'ars!" flashed the new-comer. "You, Rube, first ov all! Then I'll settle with the rest ov the butchers."

The astonished crowd had retreated, and were staring into the muzzles of the outstretched revolvers.

"You killed the b'ars, Revelation! I'm goin' to finish you!"

"No! no! not until I know the secret!" exclaimed a woman's voice, and the next instant the figure of Posy Nell was precipitated between Rube and the bear-tamer.

At that thrilling moment a jet of fire leaped from one of the deadly weapons, and the girl—not the chief of the Tigers—reeled from the flash.

Bill Bravo staggered back with a cry of horror.

"Posy Nell instead ov Revelation!" he gasped. "Great God! an angel instead ov a wolf!"

An instant later the crowd rushed forward, and the bear-tamer would have been riddled with bullets if two huge grizzlies had not risen on their hind feet and presented a bold front to the mob.

"Kin you walk, Dictionary?" asked Bill, addressing the youth at his feet.

"I can try."

But Nat was forced to fall back when he attempted to rise.

"We'll hev to fight it out hyar!" grated Bill Bravo.

All at once the startling war-whoop of the Sioux nation fell on every ear, and before it had ceased to sound a volley was poured into the mob and against the weather-boarding of Idaho Ike's den.

"I did not come alone to Cinnamon!" grated Bill. "I shoot for the baby b'ars, the Injuns fur Karl ther Killer!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NAT'S NEW FRIEND.

BUT few of the men of Cinnamon went down before the Indian volley. Bill Bravo, his bears, and Nat Grayscot remained untouched by the avenging balls, when with fiendish yells the Sioux rushed to the attack.

Revelation Rube and his pards mechanically fell back, and as the door of Idaho Ike's den stood invitingly open they crowded into the place with cocked revolvers in their hands. As the last man crossed the threshold the door was shut, and kept closed by the three bronzed giants, who put their backs against it.

The frenzied red skins reached the scene too late to effect an entrance. They were confronted by Bill and his bears.

One of the braves sprung forward to finish Nat's career, but the paw of Dandy Dick dealt his arm a blow that caused him to drop the up-lifted tomahawk and yell with pain.

"Thar ar' four ov us!" cried Bill Bravo who witnessed the bear's defense of his new friend. "When you touch one you touch all the rest, so be keerful in the future."

The Sioux now turned their attention to the den in which the men of Cinnamon had taken refuge. They seemed to ignore the presence of the whites and the bears.

"We must leave hyar fur the present," said Bill Bravo, stooping over Nat. "I did an awful deed awhile ago. I ought to be scalped fur pressing the trigger when I did, but I didn't know the gal war erbout. She appeared between us like a ghost an' my weapon went off jes' at that time. Let Black Feather finish the work. Him an' his red-skins will settle fur the b'ars, an' fur yer father's blood."

Nat would have resisted.

Wounded though he was, he did not want to leave Revelation Rube to the mercy of the infuriated Indians. He had discovered his father's slayer, and he longed to carry out with his own hand the resolution he had formed.

Bill Bravo seemed to read this in Nat's hesitation, for he called one of the grizzlies to his side, and before the young avenger could protest, Bill's hand was holding him upon the back of the bear, which was trotting from the spot.

"We'll come back ef ther Injuns leave a nest egg!" the bear-tamer said in response to Nat's look. "Ye'r onfit for sarvice now. Thar's a bullet somewhar in yer anatomy, an' ye hev the honor ov bein' the only man what didn't lie still arter Revelation tetched the trigger."

"He'll pay for granting me that honor," hissed Nat.

"Mebbe so, Dictionary."

"Do you think the Indians will make a clean sweep to-night?"

"That depends. Ef Idaho's shanty is fixed ez I think it is thar'll be more'n one dead Injun on ther squar afore we git to the mountains."

"A rear door?"

"Thet's it."

A few seconds later the sudden reports of more than a score of revolvers reached the ears of the partners hastening from Cinnamon. An expression of triumph overspread the bear-tamer's face.

"Thar! didn't I tell ye so?" he exclaimed, looking into Nat's face. "The Tigers an' the the Cherubs got out in the rear ov Ike's shanty, an' they've taken the Injuns on the flank."

The two friends and their ferocious companions had halted just beyond the outskirts of the town, and were listening to the noise of the mad battle raging in the square that fronted Idaho Ike's saloon.

They could see nothing, but the ceaseless pistol shots told them that the struggle was of the most desperate nature.

"The Injuns seem to be surrounded," said Bill. "But they're fightin' like tigers. Thar's no discount on Black Feather. I saw 'im tried once in the Crow kentry."

The battle ceased as suddenly as it had been resumed, and the friends in the moonlight exchanged puzzled looks.

"I don't understand it," murmured Bill.

"Unless one side has annihilated the other."

"Thet's not likely. Im afraid it means a new twist to the wheel ov fortune."

"A compromise?" asked Nat.

Bill did not reply, and the youth saw by the workings of his countenance that he was burning with eagerness.

"I'm goin' back to grasp the meanin' ov the confab among the dead," the bear-tamer said, turning with an abruptness that startled Nat. "You an' the b'ars kin go on to the cave. Dandy Dick will carry you ef you hold on; thet's all you'll hev to do, Dictionary. Thar now! no protests. You've got one ready, I see; but I won't take any stock in it."

Nat bit his lip.

"What if Revelation has escaped with his life?" he said.

"I'll promise you anything now, Dictionary. I won't settle accounts with Revelation to-night, although he slit ther throats ov ther baby b'ars. I'll let 'im live till you git able to go round ag'in. Thet's what yer eyes ar' beggin' fur now."

The bear-tamer had seemingly read Nat's inmost thoughts, and before the youth could thank him, he was gliding back to the scene of the battle which had ceased mysteriously and sudden.

"Now let us resume our journey," said Nat, turning to the bears. "I am not badly wounded, that is certain; but I'm in no fighting condition. I pray heaven, Revelation Rube, that the balls of the Indians failed to take your life to-night."

The two grizzlies moved on side by side until the mountain trail became too narrow, when Rocky Dan moved ahead to clear the way for his companion to whose back the young avenger clung.

"I cannot—I will not believe that Bill killed Nelly," he said to himself as his mind returned to the bear-tamer's brief narrative of the terrible shooting scene before Idaho Ike's. "Heaven will not let such a promising life be snuffed out so cruelly. Bill will find her alive, though wounded, like myself. We are destined to meet again—Posy Nell and I. I will not believe otherwise, because my presentiment is too strong in that direction."

He was now being borne upward to the opening of the cavern, and the streaks of dawn were chasing away the long night of tragic scenes as he was carried into the Retreat.

With an ejaculation of relief Dictionary Nat disengaged himself from his singular steed, and reclined on a blanket before the few coals of the bear king's fire.

He did not see for several moments the murdered cubs over whom Bill Bravo had sworn eternal vengeance against Revelation Rube and his pards. The two old bears were making almost human demonstrations over the carcasses. Suddenly they broke out in loud growls which increased in intensity until Dictionary Nat thought they were going mad, and laid his hand on his only remaining revolver.

"In their rage they might attack me," passed rapidly through his mind. "They want human blood, and want it bad."

The two grizzlies, at times playful as kittens, were now monsters incarnate. They filled the cave home with their roars, and tramped incessantly around the cubs—all four of whom they had dragged to one place—until their looks and huge feet more than threatened Nat Grayscot.

"A few more mad circles and I will be attacked!" he murmured bestowing a firmer grip on the weapon clutched in his right hand. "Bill did not dream of this when he sent me on ahead. I am at the mercy of two of the largest grizzlies in the Rockies; but I will not submit while I can lift a hand!"

The rage of the bears increased every moment. Not one of their movements escaped Nat's eye.

Suddenly Rocky Dan, the larger of the two, stopped in one of his rounds and turned a ferocious front to the youth.

"It is coming!" thought Nat.

The next instant Dandy Dick paused and strode to his companion's side.

"You advance at your peril, blood-seekers!" grated Nat leveling the revolver. "You attack the best friend you ever had when you charge me. Don't I hate the men who killed the cuts? Bill would tell you so if he were here. But if you have determined to attack me, I am ready."

He addressed the grizzlies in a firm voice as though the dark brown monsters were human beings.

Rocky Dan growled derisively and thrust forward another foot.

Dictionary Nat's finger had begun to press the trigger when Dandy Dick suddenly cast his lumbering body before his companion, and effectually blockaded the way to his victim.

A breath of relief from the expectant victim and a look of gratitude rewarded the mediator.

Dandy Dick shot Nat a look which seemed to promise new friendship, and for a moment the two grizzlies eyed each other like gladiators.

If Rocky Dan overtopped his comrade, he did not relish the thought of engaging him in mortal combat, for Dick's eyes rather invited the fray, and his attitude was a menace.

"Thank heaven!" ejaculated the young avenger reclining on the ground.

"One finds strange friends in this wild land. Dandy Dick has outlooked his giant companion. I am saved for the present!"

The big grizzly had actually turned his back on Dandy Dick and gone back to the cubs.

His vanquisher with another look that assured Nat of continued protection, came toward him and sat down at his side.

"A thousand thanks, my old fellow," said the Avenger looking up into the grizzly's face. "From this night we are the truest of friends. I would shed my blood for you. You have saved my life—preserved it for the work before me!"

A huge paw dropped lightly upon the hand which he put forward in pledge of the friendship spoken by tongue and eye; but Nat did not imagine that he would soon be called upon to prove his assertion—that he was willing to shed his blood for Dandy Dick.

By-and-by, despite his wound and watchfulness, overstrained nature asserted her power, and Nat Grayscot fell asleep.

When he awoke he felt a sharp twitching pain in his side, and caught sight of two eyes watching at his head.

"Here yet?" he exclaimed, recognizing the friendly grizzly. "You would not desert me for a moment while I slept, old fellow. Where is your pard, Rocky Dan?"

Nat raised himself on his elbow and looked around.

Dandy Dick's companion had disappeared, and with him the four dead cubs.

He was speculating on the disappearance when the grizzly guard uttered a short sharp growl and bounded toward the opening.

A moment later he came back followed by a figure which Nat instantly recognized:

"Back alive, thank Heaven!" cried the avenger.

Bill Bravo for a moment avoided Nat's gaze, but advanced until he stood directly over his friend.

"Whar's yer revolver, Dictionary?" he suddenly asked.

"Here," was Nat's reply, as he lifted the weapon which had dropped from his hand while he slept.

"Cock it."

Nat obeyed while he stared wonderingly into Bill's face.

"Now shoot me, Dictionary! Give it to me squar' between the eyes."

A strange cry pealed from Nat's throat, and he shrunk from his companion with a shudder.

"Don't flinch, Dictionary! I mean what I say. You kin never keep yer oath an' I hev broken mine. I hev wiped out Revelation Rube; but I'll swar that I couldn't help it. My hand wouldn't stay down!"

Nat Grayscot uttered only a groan of bitter disappointment, and the revolver fell from his hand.

"I thought ye hed more grit than thet, Dictionary," said Bill Bravo, with a grim smile, as he looked down upon the youth whom his announcement had completely unnerved.

CHAPTER IX.

A TUMBLE FROM A BARREL.

BILL BRAVO was quite positive that he had slain Revelation Rube.

Let us go back a step and witness the encounter.

It was the mysterious stillness brooding over Cinnamon City that had caused the bear-tamer to retrace his steps leaving Nat to continue his journey on the grizzly's back to the cave in the mountain side.

Bill more than half believed that the sudden cessation of hostilities between the Indians and the men of Cinnamon meant a compact of some kind, and he was not slow to conjecture that the true facts concerning the shooting of Karl the Killer had been made known to Black Feather.

He became certain of this when, as he neared the square, he heard the voice of Revelation Rube, and a moment later, he saw a crowd around that worthy who occupied the head of a whisky barrel in front of Idaho Ike's den.

Indians and whites were mixed together fraternizing like old friends, not like enemies who had just been firing at each other's hearts.

"The wolves hev become lambs!" ejaculated Bill, as he leaned against the rough weather boarding of an adjacent cabin and took in the scene with a smile. "Ther truth about Karl's wipin' out hez been punched into Black Feather's head, an' he's mad enough to eat himself, fur hevin' marched shoulder to shoulder with the man what did the job. They're all mad. Thar goes Revelation ag'in. I'll take in a part ov his speech. Mebbe I kin git a grip on thet part ov the programme thet consarns me."

"Fortunately our shootin' didn't amount to much arter all," said the man on the barrel at this moment.

"The Sioux an' the men ov Cinnamon must not be enemies when er common cause should unite 'em. Them two mountain pards must be wiped out; we—the Tigers—will take the book-rat, an' the red-men kin hunt the b'ar-man. Er we'll hunt together jes' ez our friend Black Feather says."

"Black Feather and his braves will hunt the man who sent Karl the Killer to the lone lodge across the mountains of the sky," cried the ringing voice of the Sioux warrior. "He met Black Feather in the mountains and made his blood hot against the men of Cinnamon with a string of lying words. Now the Indians know that the blood of their brother Karl the Killer is not on their brothers' hands; but on those of the man who keeps the big bears in the mountain den. They will hunt him, and before long he will lie dead between his grizzlies."

A derisive smile crossed the face of the man in the shadows.

"Don't count yer chickens yet, Black Feather," he murmured. "Ther buzzards may hold a post mortem on yer remains long afore they get a chance at Bill Bravo's."

The Sioux's speech was greeted with shouts of joy and approbation by the assembled multitude.

"The book-rat won't be a breakfast-spell fur us," said Revelation Rube, "thar's no tellin' how badly I winged 'im to-night. He war tossed onto one ov them infernal b'ars who trotted off with 'im folloed by Bill Bravo with a hull hide. Thar arn't ez many b'ars in ther

cave now ez thar war yesterday, thet is not ez many live ones. Snakes an' lizards! Black Feather, you an' yer braves ought to hev seen us sail into ther lot ov cubs what Bill war raisin' fur his enemies' benefit. Bill an' ther youngster hedn't got home yet, an' we tharfore found only ther four babies in ther mountain cradle. They war fierce ez old wolves, an' it warn't child's play thet we hed on our hands. We got 'em cornered at last, an' I told ther boys to stand back. The revenge b'longed to me, fur hedn't Bill grossly insulted me by takin' his pard out ov Ike's jis' when we hed 'im foul! Wal, when I told the boys to stand back in ther cave, I sailed into ther cubs, and planted some cold lead where it 'd do ther most good. Then I turned my attention to ther breathin' apparatus, an' I left 'em in er condition most beautiful to behold. I'd like to know how Bill acted when he found ther baby b'ars with ther windpipes exposed. They could dance a horn-pipe on the'r hind feet, I hev heard; but the'r in no dancin' condition jes' now."

Revelation Rube supplemented his coarse jest with a rough laugh which went through the crowd.

"Thet's more than humanity kin stan'!" fell from Bill Bravo's lips. "I promised Dictionary thet I wouldn't tech Revelation; but I can't bear thet laugh over ther killin' ov ther baby b'ars."

Up flew the bear-tamer's revolver as he sprung impulsively from the shadow of the cabin, and at the sharp report of the weapon Revelation Rube tumbled from his barrel and fell among his companions!

"I don't hev to aim it seems when I shoot for ther b'ars," dropped from Bill's lips. "Vengeance d'rects ther bullet. I'll go back to ther cave, an' let Dictionary plant a bullet in my head. I've spiled his revenge."

The shooting of Revelation Rube so sudden and unexpected, seemed to paralyze the crowd, and before a single person turned toward the avenger he had left the cabin, and was hurrying in the direction of the cave.

"It wouldn't be policy fur me to stay an' fight ther pards on the'r own ground," he said. "We'll meet ag'in an' soon enough ef Dictionary doesn't display a certain kind ov grit when I get back to ther cave."

At that moment certain sounds told Bill Bravo that the allies were hunting the man who had shot Revelation Rube, but as they did not near him, he kept on until he found himself at the edge of the mountain town where he paused for a moment, and listened with a revolver in his hand.

"Another man wiped out on the square," suddenly said a voice so near the grizzly king that he turned like a person struck in the side with an arrow.

He had halted near a cabin, and it was in the door that the speaker, tall sinewy and striking, stood.

"It ar' Placer Pandey," exclaimed the bear-tamer as he stepped forward and confronted the old miner who started and allowed his hand to drop to the butt of his revolver.

"You've bin down thar?" said Placer, recognizing Bill. "You hed to come back an' shoot ag'in. You didn't hit a young girl this time, did you?"

"Thank Heaven, no."

"Who war it?"

"Revelation Rube."

Placer Pandey bounded from the door-step, and landed at Bill Bravo's side.

"Did—you—kill him?" in gasps.

"Ef I didn't, blame it upon ther unsartin light."

"Awhile ergo, Bravo, I would hev thanked you fur thet shot; now—now I wish you hedn't come back ther second time. Ther girl ar' goin' to git over it."

"Then I didn't kill 'er?"

"Not quite, but it war a close shave. She's in thar," and Placer Pandey pointed over his shoulder toward the shanty.

"I couldn't see 'er, I s'pose?" said Bill.

"'Twould be good news fur Dictionary." The old miner did not speak, but led the way to the cabin, across whose threshold he stepped, followed closely by Nat Grayscot's friend, on whose face was an anxious and eager expression.

"This ar' Rube's shanty," exclaimed Placer in a low tone. "I hev no right hyar; but how could I keep erway when I saw them carry Posy Nell fur dead through ther door?"

"For dead, Placer?"

"Thet's jes' it, Bravo. But hyar we ar'."

The only light that revealed the interior of Revelation Rube's cabin was that afforded by

the moon, but it was sufficient to reveal the white face and bandaged head that rested on the pillow of bear-skin not far from the door.

Posy Nell was asleep, and the bear-tamer stopped suddenly and riveted his gaze upon the face on the pillow.

"Ef you hed killed 'er, Bill, you would hev gained the worse foe man ever hed," said Placer Pandey through clinched teeth. "Ther ar' some things what you don't know yet, but ef you hed finished Nell when you shot, even though you didn't intend to hurt her—you would hev discovered suthin' afore the proper time."

There was a mystery somewhere in the miner's sentences; Bill Bravo looked puzzled.

"I don't understand you, Placer," he said.

"Ov course you don't," with a smile. "I didn't intend thet you should; but we aren't enemies ef you did draw Nelly's blood to-night. We won't waken ther child."

"No; let her sleep."

Placer Pandey, who during the brief dialogue had knelt at the young girl's pillow, started suddenly up and grasped the bear-tamer's sleeve.

"Ef she war fit to move she shouldn't stay hyar a minute!" he cried. "She war dead when they brought 'er hyar, but I brought 'er back to life, an' hev'n't I a right to her, Bill? She's no more Revelation's child than she ar' yours. By-an'-by you'll know suthin'. An' so you killed Rube?"

The question was shot into the ears of the grizzly king with an abruptness that made him start.

"I'll admit thet I played the fool, Placer, thet I forgot thet the boy, Dictionary, holds a mortgage on his heart—"

"Thar!" interrupted Pandey. "Ef you killed 'im thet settles it. I held ther first mortgage on 'im, an' I always said I would kill the mau what wiped 'im out 'an cheated me."

"I'm thet man," said the avenger of the cubs stepping back.

"I can't kill you with the gal lyin' thar."

"Then follow me down ther trail a few rods."

"No! go back to yer wounded pard. You kin tell him thet Nell still lives. I like ther youngster, but thar's sich a thing ez a man hev'n't too much grit. Nell wouldn't be thar ef he hed grinned an' downed ther devil's dram."

At that moment the girl moved and opened her eyes.

"Heavens! go!" cried Placer Pandey, pushing the bear-tamer toward the door. "You'll see her soon enough ef she lives, an' Placer ef she dies!"

CHAPTER X.

RIFLES AND TRUMPS.

SEEKING to address the old miner no more, but with a farewell glance at Posy Nell, whose wandering eyes were gradually becoming fixed upon him in a questioning stare, the bear-tamer crossed the threshold of Revelation Rube's shanty and hastened toward the mountain home.

We have seen him enter it, and startle Nat the Avenger with the declaration that he had killed the captain of the Tigers of Cinnamon.

Of the truth of his assertion Bill Bravo had not the least doubt. He had seen Rube tumble from the barrel at the report of his pistol, there fore he had good reasons for thinking that he had sent a bullet into the desperado's brain.

"Wal," he said, addressing Nat, "ef you won't pay me fur killin' Rube, mebbe you'll let me tell ye a bit ov good news."

"Go on."

"I shot the gal you know when she jumped atween Rube an' me?"

"Well?"

"She isn't dead, thank Heaven!"

Dictionary Nat's eyes gave expression to the joy caused by Bill's announcement but he said:

"Not dead?"

"It war a close call, however," continued Bill, "fur they carried her fur dead to Rube's shanty whar Placer found 'er, an' whar I left 'em both an hour ago. But hyar I've been standin' ten minutes without once askin' you about yer wound."

"It doesn't hurt me now," Nat said. "I shall be ready for whatever the days may bring forth after to-morrow."

The bear-tamer examined Nat's wound which proved to be a bad flesh shot in the thigh, but one not at all dangerous.

"What hez become ov the baby b'ars?" suddenly inquired the western surgeon.

"I do not know. They were yonder when I fell asleep."

"An' Rocky Dan is missin', too!"

"Might he not have carried the cubs away?"
 "To bury 'em? That's jis' what the old chap's done. I'll hunt 'im up in a few minutes."

Not long afterward the figure of Bill Bravo crept down the mountain side in the increasing light of morning.

The bear-tamer was intent on discovering the whereabouts of the murdered cubs, and Rocky Dan the old grizzly.

"The old b'ars mustn't leave ther cave without orders," he said, half aloud. "Ther time hez come when four ov us must stand together. The hull Cinnamon pack will be down on us afore long. Then look out."

A brief examination of the narrow trail that skirted the base of the mountain told Bill Bravo that a body of some kind had been lately dragged over it, and he at once knew that the big grizzly had carried off the cubs.

"Rocky Dan ar' hev'n' a funeral ov his own somewhar," the mountaineer said, as he hastened over the trail. "I'll stake my pistols ag'in' Revelation's last drink, thet he's selected the Big Holler fur his graveyard."

Ten minutes later the grizzly king halted at the edge of a dark hollow, basin-shaped, and not at all inviting. But little sunshine ever penetrated it, and on this occasion as the day-god was not two hours high, the center of the hollow was dark and forbidding.

Still Bill Bravo could see a huge figure moving about where the shadows lay thickest, and doubting not that it was Rocky Dan's, he sprung forward.

"I'm too late fur the sarvices, I see, but I kin throw on the baby's grave the pistol thet wiped out Revelation Rube!" he exclaimed as he halted before the monster grizzly which had wheeled at sound of his voice.

The bear's answer was a fierce growl that made the mountaineer recoil.

"A strange b'ar, by hokey!" fell from his lips. "It ain't ther first time you've jumped at conclusions, Bill. Now fur a tussle with ther grizzly king."

If the bear-tamer had recoiled, the king of the Rockies had stood his ground.

He was larger than the largest of Bill's pets, but this fact did not frighten the mountaineer. His left hand relieved his belt of a fourteen-inch bowie as the click, click of the revolver clutched in his right fell upon the grizzly's ears.

"I'll open ther ball!" he said as he sent a bullet squarely into the bear's front.

A howl of commingled rage and pain told that the leaden pellet had inflicted a wound, but instead of retreating the grizzly rose quickly on his hind feet and advanced upon the enemy.

"Now comes the knife's hour!" said the mountaineer, dropping the revolver and transferring the bowie to his right hand. "More'n once I've faced yer betters, grizzly. Come on an' meet yer master—the man what wiped out ther biggest devil in Cinnamon City!"

Bill Bravo even advanced to meet the huge antagonist that threatened avalanche-like to fall upon and crush him. He threw forward his left arm to turn aside the paw uplifted to strike him down, and the next second he aimed a blow at the grizzly's side.

If his stroke was swift the bear was prepared for it, for instead of the heart, the bowie encountered one of the fore-limbs into which it sunk almost to the hilt!

"Thunders! a paw instead ov a heart!" grated the bear-tamer.

A moment later the grizzly sprung back, wrenching from Bill's grasp the bowie which still stuck in the wound, and for a minute the mountaineer found himself weaponless and in the presence of a monster who had by no means given up the contest.

"You can't unknife Bill Bravo that easy!" flashed the bear-tamer. "Ef you hev yer dander up thar's a feller not far off who kin elevate his."

The grizzly rose again as the courageous man rushed at him, and quick as a flash of lightning Bill's hand shot at the bowie hilt which in spite of the blow aimed at his hand by the other paw he seized, and with a terrible wrench drew from the wound.

The hot breath of the bear was on his cheek, the eyes that glared at him seemed coals of living fire, and the uplifted paws were veritable war-clubs of strength. But Bill Bravo did not retreat.

Straight at the grizzly he sprung, and his arm, knife-armed once more, darted between the menacing paws, which, as he struck a blow that sent the crimson blade far beneath the aggy skin, closed about him like the arms of som!

Another moment and the two went to the ground together like wrestling giants, Bill clinging to the hilt of the bowie, and the teeth of the grizzly buried in his shoulder.

"Down they go!" the mountaineer heard a voice say as he struck the earth, but, as he could not turn his head, he did not see the speaker.

"Ther grizzly hez got ther upper hand, pards, an' he'll prevent us from settlin' with ther cave devil," continued the same voice. "Drop yer pistols an' give 'em ther compliments ov ther rifles ov Cinnamon. Now, into the grizzly an' Bill, pards! Fire!"

A deafening volley followed the command, and a score of bullets whistled around Bill Bravo and his enemy.

He felt no pain, but the bear's teeth suddenly left his shoulder, and the huge paws that seemed about to crush him fell apart like the jaws of a broken vise.

The volley had killed the grizzly, and the bear-tamer, mysteriously unscathed, was at liberty to rise and confront foes as deadly as the one of which their rifles had just relieved him.

Bill Bravo followed the first thought that rushed through his brain. He sprung erect, armed solely with the bowie which had been drawn from the grizzly's breast as the animal fell back dead, and turned in the direction of the firers of the volley.

"Ho! ho! we never teched ther book-rat's pard!" roared a coarse voice as Bill Bravo turned. "Cover 'im, pards, with ther best pistols ov ther Rockies. We'll make 'im show his hand."

The sight that met the bear-tamer's gaze was enough to blanch the stoutest cheek.

Fifty yards away, shoulder to shoulder, stood the twenty men whose rifles had just put an end to the grizzly's life. It was no fault of theirs that their bullets had not terminated his career at the same moment.

They were a portion of the Tigers of Cinnamon City, Revelation Rube's pards, and of course his avengers.

"Show yer hand, Bravo!" came over the space between them. "Ye kin tumble Revelation from his bar'l, but the game goes on. We've sot a cold deck up on ye, by ther grizzly's help. Rifles ar' trumps in ther Big Holler."

A fearless flash in the mountaineer's eyes was the sole response to these words.

He changed his bowie to his left hand, and coolly picked up the revolver that lay at his feet.

"Ef fight's yer game, hyar stan' ther boys what ar' itchin' to play it," were the words that greeted his action. "A fool fights twenty men an' dies like a dog. Revelation Rube couldn't come along. Ye'r' afraid to drop yer weapons, Bill, an' let us conduct you to him."

The bear-tamer started.

"I kin do thet," he said to himself. "It might save Nat besides. Then they've got me foul, Revelation's pards hev."

"Yer dare not go with us to Revelation Rube!" was the challenge.

"Thet's a lie!" said Bill Bravo, as he put up both knife and revolver.

CHAPTER XI.

BEFORE JUDGE LYNCH'S COURT.

WAS Bill Bravo going back to Cinnamon City with the twenty desperadoes who held his life in their hands?

The Tigers exchanged significant glances at his reply to their challenge, and advanced upon him with their revolvers still covering his breast.

The bear-tamer did not flinch, but his eagle eyes flashed as they came on.

"Yer warn't lookin' fur us hyar, Bill?" queried the leader of the band.

"Thet's a fact, Solid Sol."

"An' we didn't expect to find you in ther Big Holler. Thar war two b'ars hyar a while ago, fur we heard 'em growlin' afore we struck the spot. Didn't you find two?"

"The only b'ar I found hyar lies yonder," said Bill, glancing at the huge carcass of his late opponent. "Mebbe the old grizzly saved my life arter all."

Some of his captors smiled.

"Ef thar war two b'ars hyar at one time the other war Rocky Dan," mused the mountaineer. "Fur once Rocky met his match an' backed out ov the scrimmage, but not until arter he had buried ther babies. I'll bet my head on thet."

"Ar' you ready, Bill?" were the words that put an end to the bear king's musings.

"To go to Cinnamon? Yes."

"Whar's ther boy—ther book-rat?"

"Dead afore this from the shot Revelation gave him last night."

"At ther cave?"

"I don't know."

The last answer puzzled the men.

"Pards, we've got the main man," said the leader of the Tigers, putting an end to more than one whispered suggestion. "The young bird are crippled anyhow, an' we kin ketch 'im when he's wanted. We'll go back to Cinnamon with the man we've got. For'ard!"

A gleam of satisfaction lit up the depths of Bill Bravo's eyes.

He had kept the roughs of the mountain city from making a descent upon Dictionary Nat.

As Bill was conducted through the hollow, his eyes espied a heap of fresh earth, on and around which were numerous bear-tracks.

"Rocky Dan hed his funeral jes' ez I expected," he said to himself.

He was correct. If one had opened the mound he would have uncovered the carcasses of the four cubs, which the old grizzly, Rocky Dan, had buried by digging a grave with his claws.

The sun was climbing zenithward when the Tigers and their captive re-entered the abode of the Rocky Mountain roughs.

Bill was marched down the main thoroughfare and across the threshold of Idaho Ike's den, into which the population of Cinnamon began to pour.

The bear-tamer's glance ran through the crowd as if in quest of a particular person.

All at once he caught sight of a figure that leaned against the upright planks at the rear end of the resort. He saw the stalwart frame and noticed that the man's arms were folded upon his broad chest, but he had to look a second time before he recognized Placer Pandy, the miner.

"If Posy Nell still lived, the bear-tamer had one friend at least in the den; if she was dead, the saloon held but his enemies.

He was unable to fathom the gaze with which the miner was regarding him. Suddenly Placer left his post, and Bill lost sight of him.

"Ther gal is dead!" flashed through his mind. "I can't count on Placer now."

Then he turned to the man who had led his captors, and said in an impatient tone:

"Hyar I am, Solid Sol. You said I war afraid to go back to Cinnamon."

"Any man will march straight ahead when thar ar' twenty revolvers at his back," was the reply as the eyes of the two men met. "What ar' we waitin' fur? You'll know in less than five minutes."

Bill Bravo leaned complacently against the ragged rim of the bar and faced the men who were thirsting for his blood. Every right hand clutched a revolver. No efforts were made to conceal the deadly weapons; their owners took pride, as it seemed, to hold them conspicuously before Bill's eyes.

In spite of all this, he knew that he would be accorded fair play when the proper moment arrived, for the mountain roughs admired fearlessness even in their worst enemy, and it was evident that Bill's courage had impressed them. Still, if he had drawn his revolver at that moment, fifty weapons would have flashed in his face.

The bear-tamer had more than once mentally remarked the absence of Black Feather and his band.

Not an Indian was to be seen.

Were the fierce avengers of Karl the Killer hunting him among the mountains? and would they not swoop down upon the mountain cave, and put an end to Nat Grayscot's career?

"Don't look fur yer shaggy pards, Bill," said one of the men noticing the glance which the mountaineer had sent toward the door. "We're prepared fur them this time."

"Twenty rifles ar' waitin' fur ther b'ars outside," said another voice.

"They wouldn't git to ther squar' afore they'd be full ov lead."

"I warn't lookin' fur ther b'ars," retorted the bear-tamer. "I want 'em to stay whar they ar' this time, but if they take a notion to come to me all ther rifles in Cinnamon couldn't stop 'em."

The boast drew out a general laugh, which was followed by the words. "Hyar they come!" in a loud voice.

There was a universal clicking of revolver locks, and a general movement toward the door, but the next instant the crowd fell back disappointed, for the announcement had led them to believe at first that the two grizzlies had put in an appearance.

Bill Bravo was seen to start as the doorway

was suddenly darkened by three figures, and a moment later two men, leading a third between them, entered the den.

"I thought the bullet would go straight without aimin' but thar's whar I missed!" ejaculated the roughs' prisoner, and he then encountered the fierce gaze of the man led by the couple just mentioned.

It was Revelation Rube, clad in a dark shirt, and buckskin pants, the ends of the latter garment stuffed into the tops of a pair of dingy boots.

There were stains of blood on the shirt, darker than its own swarthy texture, and around the desperado's chest was a broad bandage which told that Cinnamon City possessed some one who professed to know something about surgery.

Rube's eyes had the glare of a madman's and although weak, he tried to stand alone when he found himself before Bill Bravo; but he would have fallen forward if his conductors had not caught and held him firmly.

"My pards didn't hunt you long, Bravo!" commenced Rube laughing not at his own words but over the pleasure occasioned by the sight of the mountaineer in the midst of his roughs. "You war hyar last night! I carry in my lungs yer infernal compliments."

Did Bill Bravo's eyes shoot the speaker a look of triumph?

"That's enough! you war hyar!" continued Rube interpreting the glance. "You thought you would pay me back fur the cubs, eh Bill?"

"Fur ther baby b'ars!" flashed the grizzly king, straightening so suddenly that the breathless crowd involuntarily drew back. "Ef I planted a bullet in yer lungs an' not in yer head last night, it warn't my fault. I broke a solemn promise when I teched the trigger an' that is why, mebbe, the bullet went astray. Yer pards an' ther Injuns stopped fightin' so sudden that I hed to come back to see what it all meant. I could have heard ye through if you hadn't boasted about slittin' the cubs' throats. I had raised ther b'ars from little chunks ov meat an' h'ar, an' to hear you talk the way you did war more 'n I could stan'!"

Revelation Rube ground his teeth but demonism danced in his eyes.

"You wouldn't do it again, Bill?" he ventured.

"Wouldn't I? Try me!" was the quick rejoinder, as the revolver of the bear-tamer left his belt and was cocked despite the menace of the twenty that surrounded him. "Jes' boast ov yer visit to the Retreat, Revelation. Laugh now ez you laughed last night about cuttin' the babies' throats an' yer laugh will end in the ears ov death!"

Out shot Bill's right arm as the last sentence left his tongue, and its muzzle almost touched the forehead of the Tigers' chief.

"Keep down yer pistols!" he said, sending a lightning glance through the crowd. "I've got the call on yer pard. I want 'im to laugh once more over his butchery ov ther little grizzlies!"

But the laugh did not ripple over the white lips of the menaced rough.

"Ye'r sensible, Rube," said Bill a moment later lowering the revolver but keeping his finger at the trigger.

For a second Revelation Rube did not speak. Almost choked by rage and fear, he was that length of time catching his breath.

"What if you shot me hyar, Bill?" he said.

"That's so," was the answer. "I would be a fool to hurry the grim monster over the trail he's on at this moment."

"Then you think I'm goin' to pass in my last chip soon?"

Bill Bravo's gaze answered the desperado.

"I'll go you a pound ov dust that I'll see more sunrises than you!" hissed Rube.

"You'll hev to see a dozen afore dark, an' to do that you'll hev to wipe Bill Bravo out."

"You won't stake ther dust, then?"

"I never bet with dyin' men."

Revelation's eyes led his prisoner's face and encountered the eager gaze of his minions.

"Organize ther court!" he said, in a tone intended to be a voice of command.

"Hyar, Rube?" inquired a dozen men.

"Sartinly, ef Ike hez no objections."

"Go ahead, gentlemen," responded Idaho Ike.

"You hev'n't held court hyar since last spring."

Ike knew that during the session of Judge Lynch's court a goodly quantity of liquor would be imbibed, and he was, therefore, willing that the farce should be enacted in his den.

Bill Bravo said nothing, but a contemptuous smile was visible at the corners of his mouth.

He saw a rude platform erected upon several wooden benches at one end of the room, and

Solid Sol, springing upon it, called the "court" to order.

At that moment a man glided past the bear-tamer and halted a foot away. When he had asked for a drink, he caught Bill's eyes for a moment, and said hastily, in a penetrating whisper:

"Thar ar' twenty ov us, pard. We took you in by a unanimous vote last night. Lift yer hand when you want us."

That was all.

The stranger swallowed his liquor and disappeared almost before Bill had had a square look at him.

One thing he did know—the man was not Placer Pandey.

"The man may lie," murmured the bear-tamer. "It's impossible fur me to hev twenty friends in Cinnamon at sich a time ez this. I hev'n't one; but I'll lift my hand when I need help, jes' to try ther experiment."

CHAPTER XII.

NEW HANDS IN THE GAME.

To more than one man in the improvised court the termination of Revelation Rube's wild career seemed a question of very few hours. The rage that flashed in the eyes that were riveted on Bill Bravo did not abate one jot, and beneath them, around the twitching lips of the desperado, lurked a triumphant smile.

"Make 'er short!" he whispered to his attendants, referring to the trial about to take place. "I'll feel better when ther hand that teched ther trigger last night stiffens under a limb. He won't be hard to pull up when the verdict hez been pronounced. I'll be thar when ther affair comes off. By thunder! I'll be strong enough to read ther sentence ov death. The man what meddles with Revelation Rube's affairs in Cinnamon handles niter-glissereen!"

Trials before Judge Lynch's court open with but few preliminaries; none are needed. Such courts are invariably organized for conviction, and the one hastily established in Idaho Ike's den with Solid Sol as judge was not an exception to the time-honored rule.

The jury—twelve bronzed athletes who did not relinquish their revolvers when they stepped aside and stood shoulder to shoulder with their eyes fastened on Bill Bravo—had delivered its verdict beforehand.

Solid Sol opened court with a few remarks in which he expatiated on the enormity of the shooting of one of the most prominent citizens of Cinnamon, and dwelt for a moment on that well-known article of the frontier criminal code which declares for "blood for blood."

"Thar, Sol, thet'll do!" exclaimed Revelation Rube as his swarthy right hand went up in view of all. "Bravo admits ther shootin' an' I'm yer prominent citizen what stopped his ball. He knows ther law. Throw ther case into ther hands ov ther jury unless he wants to speak in his own defense."

Thus choked off, Solid Sol stepped back and everybody looked at the bear-tamer.

Defiance and contempt looked out of his eyes. He said nothing.

"Give it to ther jury, then," continued Revelation, and he finished in a whisper to his attendants. "He'll open his mouth when thar's a limb over him!"

Into the hands of the bronze twelve went the cause, and a minute later the verdict fell upon Bill's ears.

Death by hanging within the hour!

"He war afraid to put up his dust," ejaculated Rube. "An' I wouldn't hev to see all my sunrises yet to-day."

"You miserable reptile, death is gnawin' at yer vitals now!" cried the mountaineer whirling upon the captain of the Tigers whose rejoicings had reached his ears. "A thousand times afore you give up yer chips you'll curse Bill Bravo whose bullet opened to death the door to yer head. I wouldn't hev shot you through the heart last night fur all the gold you ever dug an' stole! You'll die a thousand times afore the king ov terrors closes round yer heart, an' you'll wish you'd never teched the dancin' cubs!"

Headless of the menacing look of the Tigers of Cinnamon, and of the fingers itching to press thirty pistol triggers, Bill Bravo stood erect and launched his hatred into Rube's teeth.

"He's grit himself!" whispered more than one rough to his companion. "Ef Revelation expects him to blubber under the limb, he's chosen the wrong pard fur a coward, that's sartin."

Rube heard the king of the grizzlies through, though he burned to interrupt him.

"Ar' you through?" was all he said when Bill had finished.

"I've hed my say."

"To ther limb!" was the response which was a command, for strong arms seized the mountaineer as a score of pistols encircled his head and a moment later Idaho Ike's den did not contain a single person, for the proprietor was in the motley crowd hastening across the square.

Once outside the saloon, Bill Bravo mechanically threw his glance around, for the words of the stranger had recurred to his mind, but he saw nobody but his executioners.

"Ef Dandy Dick an' his pard knew this, thar'd be a scene enacted what ain't on ther bills," he said to himself. "But mebbe I hev no pards now ef Black Feather an' his wolves ar' loose among the mountains; mebbe Dictionary an' the big grizzlies ar' lyin' together euchered by a cold deck."

Near the further side of the square grew a tree which, standing alone as it did, seemed to have been left by the lawless founders of Cinnamon City for the express purpose of carrying out the mandates of Judge Lynch's court. One of its limbs stretched toward Idaho Ike's like an arm of bronze, and Bill's eye saw that a rope supplied with a noose already dangled from it.

"The boys war anticipatin' ther verdict," said Solid Sol, catching the doomed man's glance, and then his voice dropped to a whisper full of admiration: "You're goin' to go out game, Bill?"

A proud flash full of resentment shot from the bear-tamer's eyes and Solid Sol dropped his gaze, abashed by the silent rebuke.

Bill Bravo's "When I die I'll die like my mother's boy!" was not needed to tell Sol that no coward was marching to the fatal tree.

Under the limb the grizzlies' pard halted of his own accord, and turned to the mob.

Near by stood Revelation Rube held by a man at each side. A slight color came back to the rough's face as the eyes of the two enemies met.

"You won't put up an ounce of dust now, Bill?" he broke forth in insulting banter. "I'll be more liberal than I war at Ike's. I'll bet you a pound to an ounce that I see more sunrises than you, an' none ov 'em to-day, either!"

"You'll never cut another cub's throat! I'll go you a pound to an ounce on thet," was the response.

Revelation winced and bit his lip.

"Let's put an end to the man what refuses to bet when ther odds ar' in his favor," he suddenly cried. "Thar ar' rope an' limb, jedge; ther man ar' not wantin'. Men of Cinnamon, carry out ther sentence ov yer court!"

Down came the noose over Bill Bravo's head, and lay for a moment on his broad shoulders.

At his left with eyes fixed on Solid Sol stood the four men who held the other end of the lynching cord.

"I'll try the signal!" suddenly said Bill to himself. "Ef I hev pards in Cinnamon, I need 'em now!"

The command that would have jerked the bear-tamer from the ground was hurrying to the lips of Solid Sol when with a quick stride Bill Bravo threw himself forward.

At the same moment as he drew his splendid figure to its true height up shot his right hand above the heads of the crowd!

"What does that mean?" stammered Revelation Rube.

A loud voice answered him.

It came across the square and made every Tiger turn.

"Ther Cherubs ar' his pards!" exclaimed Solid Sol. "We might hev knowed this, Revelation. They held a secret meetin' last night."

"An' they voted him into the'r club."

Was it not true?

Scarcely thirty yards away and in front of one of the shanties from which they had probably emerged, stood fifteen men with rifles trained on the mob under the hangman's limb!

To all outward appearances they resembled the Tigers, but they were the rival shooting club of Cinnamon—the fearless Cherubs in whose ranks Placer Pandey had often been found, and whose captain, Wildcat Carl, was roughism itself.

Bill Bravo's eyes filled with astonishment when he beheld the startling effect of his signal, and heard the words which had kept back the command trembling on Solid Sol's tongue:

"Halt thar, Tigers! You've carried ther joke fur enough!"

There was menace unmistakable in the brief demand. It drove every vestige of color from Revelation Rube's face; Solid Sol looked at his

master, and the fingers that had leaped to the trigger at the first sight of the Cherubs, seemed to creep out of the trigger-guard, cowed on the instant.

"We mean biz'ness!" continued Wildcat Carl. "Bill Bravo ar' entitled to all the rights an' privileges ov a member ov ther Cherub club. He ar' one ov us! Stan' back from our pard, Revelation. Draw off yer Tigers!"

"We must fur policy's sake, Rube," whispered Solid Sol in response to Revelation's consulting glance. "Let Wildcat an' his pards hev their hour. We've jes' been hev'in' ours. Turn about ar' fair play."

The captain of the Tigers did not reply. Rage and chagrin choked his utterance.

"Ready, Cherubs!" rung out Wildcat Carl's impatient voice. "Kiver the best men across the squar'."

Fifteen bronzed cheeks dropped to the stocks of as many leveled rifles.

"Stan' back, but keep yer fingers on yer triggers," said Solid Sol in a low tone. "Wildcat an' his pards holds the trump kerds now."

"It's worse than er cold deck!" groaned Revelation Rube.

The next instant the Tigers fell back, glaring madly at the rough rank across the square, and Bill Bravo stood alone with the loose noose resting on his shoulders.

"For'ard, pard!" called Wildcat Carl to him. "I mean you, Bill. Throw off ther rope an' come hyar."

The bear-tamer broke with an effort the slight cords that held his arms to his sides, and threw off the almost fatal noose.

Then he strode forward brushing past Revelation Rube whose eyes seemed arrows of living flame.

"Ther Cherubs can't allus set up ther deck, Bill, hissed the wounded rough. "Go to yer new pards, an' wait till I want you. You won't hev to wait long, Bill."

"I'll be around when I'm wanted, mebbe afore," was the cutting response. "You'll not forget me while my compliments keep open house fur death in yer life chest."

"Man never forgets the snake that bites him."

"But he doesn't allus get to kill ther afore-said snake!" said the bear-tamer, with a grin as he passed beyond Rube's hearing.

He walked fearlessly toward the leveled rifles of Wildcat Carl and his pards, and as he did so his eyes searched for the familiar face of Placer Pandey.

But the old miner was not to be seen.

CHAPTER XIII.

RUBE LOSES HIS BET.

WHEN the bear tamer was within a few feet of the rifles of the Cherubs, he was about to diverge to the right and join Wildcat Carl who stood at the head of the line, but that worthy's voice changed his intention.

"Keep straight ahead, pard; the club will make a door fur ye to pass through."

A minute later the rank ahead presented a gap to Bill Bravo's gaze, and when he had passed into it it was instantly closed, and a solid front once more faced Revelation Rube and his astonished roughs.

"It war a close call, pard," said Wildcat Carl. "We war waitin' fur the sign. You kept it back a long time, an' ther boys war afraid ye warn't goin' to give 'em a chance to help their new pard. Now, Cherubs, fall back in good order, onless Rube an' his men want to try a shootin' match."

The experienced eye of the mountaineer saw that a word might inaugurate a deadly conflict between the two factions, and he hoped that the Cherubs would quietly withdraw, thus dispensing with unnecessary bloodshed.

"They don't want to grapple with ther Cherubs now," continued the leader of the bear-tamer's friends. "Ef Rube's looks war bullets we'd be dead ez door nails whar we're standin' at this minute."

The Cherubs withdrew unmolested in the faces of their enraged rivals, and not a word, not a challenge was hurled at them, until they were conducting Bill toward the confines of the mountain town.

Then coarse epithets and oaths reached their ears, and caused bronze fingers to glide with eagerness to the triggers of revolvers.

But Wildcat Carl who saw these actions shook his head.

"No fightin' now onless ther skunks charge us," he said. "We must first conduct our new pard beyond danger, then—"

He paused abruptly and looked at Bill Bravo who had all the while been regarding him.

"Then what, Wildcat?" fell mechanically from the bear-tamer's lips.

"You ought to be able to guess. You've lived long enough in these parts."

"I can guess. Havin' conducted me from Cinnamon, you will come back an' offer the Tigers battle."

"Thet's jes' it! We'd like to hev ye witness ther tussle, Bill, but a stray bullet might deprive ther boy ov his pard."

The bear-tamer started. He had not thought of Dictionary Nat for some time, and at Wildcat Carl's reference to the youth, he glanced anxiously at the heavens. The sun having reached his meridian, was slowly descending westward, and while the mountaineer felt like going back, and facing Revelation Rube and his pards in the ranks of the Cherubs, he was anxious to rejoin the young avenger whom he had left with the bear Dandy Dick in the mountain cave.

The suburbs of Cinnamon were soon reached.

"Thar'll be but one shootin' club hyar when you come back, pard," said Carl with a grim smile when the grizzly king had thanked his bronze rescuers. "I war commissioned to han' you a dockermert ov some kind before I left ye. It might be a love letter from ther size ov it. It ar' fur ther boy."

Wildcat Carl drew from beneath his dingy buckskin doublet as he spoke a folded piece of paper, on which were traceable the words, "For Nat."

Bill's eyes lit up with delight when he extended his hand.

"Nell isn't dead!" he said.

"Dead! Ef you could hev see'd her eyes glisten when she handed me thet letter, you wouldn't think about her handin' in her checks," was the quick response. "How kin she die when Placer swears she's got to live?"

The mountaineer put the paper away, and the following moment he had said good-by to the Cherubs of Cinnamon, and was hurrying toward the cavern.

Almost before he had passed out of sight, Wildcat Carl turned to his men, and said, as his eye flashed down the line:

"Let every shot tell, pards. Thar must be but one shootin' club in Cinnamon to-morrow. About face! for'ard march! It ar' cold deck ag'in' cold deck now. The Cherub what's afraid to die with his boots on will leave the ranks afore the enemy hoves in sight. Cinnamon's too small to hold two clubs."

Bravely the fearless roughs marched into the town with ranks intact, and turned into the unpaved street that ran past Idaho Ike's den and across the noted square.

"Thar they ar', ready fur ther game!" said Wildcat Carl, espying the crowd that seemed to be waiting for them in front of the saloon.

"Halt!"

The Cherubs came to a halt, and Carl, with a cocked revolver in each hand, walked boldly toward the rival club.

"We ar' back ag'in, ready to fight 'er out!" he said, addressing the crowd in front of which he halted within easy range. "Cinnamon can't hold all ov us. Ther events ov ther past few hours hev made us eternal enemies. Let ther sun to-morrow shine on livin' Tigers an' dead Cherubs, er *vice versa*. What do yer say, boys?"

Out from the crowd sprung the tall figure of Solid Sol, Revelation Rube's trusty lieutenant.

"We will not fight now," he said, "though I admit thet one club's enough fur Cinnamon. Our pistols would disturb ther last moments ov our cap'n."

"Whar's Revelation?"

"In yonder," and Solid Sol glanced at the saloon.

"Dyin'?"

"Dyin' with ther bullet ov a man what shoots in ther dark in his life-box! Let us hev a truce till death hez robbed Rube of his last check, then—"

"Thet's fair, Sol," interrupted Wildcat Carl. "Ther game will not begin fur awhile yet."

Thus unexpectedly was the bloody contest between the roughs of Cinnamon delayed, and hammers were let fall quietly upon the ready cartridge.

Wildcat Carl and a few of his men went forward and entered Idaho Ike's, where the Tigers stood over the prostrate form of Revelation Rube.

"He swears he ain't goin' under now," whispered Solid Sol to Wildcat as the latter looked over several shoulders at the wild-faced man lying on the undressed planks whose sole covering was a tattered army blazer. "Ef determination ever helped a man, Rube will see some good fightin' yet."

Almost at that moment the leader of the Tigers wrenched his arms from the grasp of the men who were trying to calm his struggles by holding him down to the floor, and sprung first to a sitting posture, and then to his feet.

"Whar's Nell?" he shouted.

"She's safe—livin', cap'n!" answered Solid Sol.

"I'm goin' to her—must see ther child."

"Thet settles it," whispered one of the Tigers. "Rube's throwed down ther kerds. He wouldn't ask thet way after Posy Nell ef he didn't think he war goin' off with his boots on."

"Go fur the gal—quick!" said Solid Sol, turning to the speechless crowd before whose eyes Revelation Rube had just torn away the bandages of his wound.

"Not a step! Nelly sha'n't come hyar. I'll go to her."

Already a man had disappeared from the crowd, and was hurrying down the street.

Rube with an oath sprung toward the door as if to intercept the man whose departure he had noticed; but a score of hands held him back.

"We've sent fur Nell," said Solid Sol. "You can't leave this place. You will see her hyar."

"But I will not tell her the secret before you men."

"We'll retire when the gal comes."

Five minutes elapsed, at the end of which time the words, "Hyar she is," made Revelation start and turn his eyes to the door.

The Lily of Cinnamon had arrived; but why did Rube utter an oath of rage, and start back instead of rushing forward to greet the girl?

"I didn't send for you, Placer Pandey!" he flashed tigerishly as he eyed the man who supported Posy Nell.

"I am hyar jes' the same. I hev'n't dogged yer steps fifteen year fur nothin', hev I Rube?"

There was triumph in the old miner's tone, and for several moments the two men eyed one another with the vindictiveness of life-long enemies.

"Wal, I've been a fool, an infernal fool, to let you see this hour," grated Revelation Rube, at last. "But I kin git even with you in ther end, Placer. I did intend to tell Posy Nell suthin, but now I'll go down ther dark river with my secret."

The girl and the miner exchanged rapid glances; the latter seemed to smile.

"You'll spite nobody but yerself, Rube," he said. "Mebbe Nelly wouldn't giv' a nickel fur yer secret. Last night when she jumped between you an' Bill Bravo she would have given her life fur yers; now she doesn't keer whether you pass in the secret with the kerds er not."

Slowly the eyes of Revelation Rube returned to Posy Nell, and became fixed on her face.

"What hez Placer told you, Nelly?" he asked in a husky voice.

"I'll tell you what," cried the old miner, before the girl could speak.

"Send the boys out first, Sol," said Rube. "This ar' private bizness between Placer an' me."

"Let these men stay," the miner cried. "I want them to hear. They shall hear!"

The dying man, whose hands seemed to make an impression on the counter against which he was trying to steady himself, bit his lip, and sent Placer Pandey a look of unquenchable hatred.

"You can't listen to a long story, Rube. Mine must be told afore the angel ov death rakes in ther last pot. Sixteen years ago everybody knew Felix Norton and the pretty little child he called his daughter, and everybody soon afterward cursed the devil who stole her from the nursery one night. Felix Norton was rich, but he had inveterate enemies, among whom was a man named Reuben Gragg, who disappeared from the neighborhood soon after the theft. Felix offered thousands for the child's return, but without avail. Both Reuben Gragg and Ada Norton had effectually disappeared. After three years of unavailing search, Felix died."

"Thet's sol!" said Revelation, who had not lost a word of Placer's story.

"Silence!" thundered the miner. "Though Felix was dead, there was one man who had resolved to find both Reuben Gragg and Ada. He had a right to hunt them—a right to find Ada and kill the girl stealer. That man did not rest until, west of the Mississippi, he had found Reuben Gragg in Revelation Rube, the Yellow Lion of the Pacific Coast. He dogged Rube's steps from the moment of his discovery. You know this, Revelation. You know that one biter has shadowed you fifteen years or thereabouts; but you succeeded until a short time ago in keeping your prize from his sight, for these men—Tigers

and Cherubs—now know that Posy Nell is Ada Norton. But they do not know that I am not Placer Pand. You do not know who I am, Revelation. I have carried a secret for more than fifteen years. Let me reveal it to you now."

The breathless listeners gathered closer around the old miner; every eye was fixed upon him.

"I am Posy Nell's father!" he said slowly.

A cry of unbelief shot from the throat of Revelation Rube.

"No wind now, Placer! Felix Norton is dead."

"But he was not Ada's father. When her mother died, I gave the child to Felix to rear as his own for he had money and I had none. You thought she was his own child when you struck for revenge, Rube Gragg. You stole my child instead. I am Roger Norton, not Placer Pand, the character I have played during my ceaseless hunt for my child. A thousand times I could have ended your career, but I said 'no,' for you could lead me to Ada, and at last you did. I knew that you killed Grayscot the merchant five years ago, and it was I who drew the son of that man into these mountains and put him, vengeance armed, on your track. I do not talk like Placer Pand the miner now, do I? I need that role no longer. Posy Nell doesn't care for your secret now! I must break a part of my vow. You know what I mean."

"I am ready for you, Placer," was the retort. "Now that I know you, I feel like a new man. Revelation Rube gets a new lease of life. Give me my pistols, Sol, and let the boys stand back. We kin fight hyar, Placer."

"Give the dog his revolver!" flashed the unmasked miner as Solid Sol drew back from Rube's outstretched hand.

"Quick! let me hev it, Sol."

The next instant the desperately wounded man once more held his revolver in his hand, and a wild cry—almost like the howl of a mad wolf—pealed from his throat as he whirled upon the old miner.

"Take the gal—Nelly—away first!" he commanded.

"Get away from before that door! I want a hand in that duel!"

These words were uttered in a loud tone by some one outside, and as the crowd turned toward the street its numbers mechanically divided and left a lane running straight to the captain of the Tigers.

A second later the report of a revolver struck the ears of every one, and with a piercing cry of death Revelation Rube staggered back, shot through the brain!

Vengeance and Justice had overtaken him at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

DICTIONARY NAT STRIKES.

If Black Feather and his warriors had been in Cinnamon City when the Tigers re-entered it with Bill Bravo for their prisoner, it is probable that several scenes last recorded would never have claimed the service of our pen. But during the bear-tamer's arraignment before the hanging court of Cinnamon, the Indians were on a trail which they fondly hoped would end with the death of the slayer of Karl the Killer—Bill Bravo.

The exact location of the mountain home was unknown to the Sioux, although they were well acquainted with the coolness of the grizzly king, but Black Feather felt sure that he could guide the band to it where they would speedily avenge the death of their adopted brother.

Therefore after leaving Cinnamon the Sioux proceeded straight down the path that led to the cave retreat; but morning overtook them among the mountains with Bill Bravo's home still undiscovered.

All at once one of the Indians uttered an exclamation of surprise and pointed excitedly at a huge grizzly swaggering alone down the trail with nose erect as though he snuffed an enemy.

"See!" cried Black Feather. "The old fellow wears a collar. He is the white killer's bear. Ah! we shall soon see the pale liar!"

But the red-skins watched in vain; the grizzly was entirely alone and more than one red finger toyed nervously in the trigger-guard as he advanced toward the ambush which had been hastily formed.

Dandy Dick—for the grizzly was Bill Bravo's favorite bear—halted abruptly fifty yards from the Indians and began to survey his surroundings.

"Him huntin' white killer," said the young Sioux chief. "Mebbe they meet by 'm by."

Dandy Dick seemed in no haste to desert the

spot; but as the moments wore away without rewarding the anxious braves, ejaculations of impatience fell on Black Feather's ears, until the chief shot the grizzly a fierce look and raised his rifle.

"Bear kill Injun, too, if him git a chance!" grated the Sioux. "Him no better than his master, the white killer. Him must die!"

The weapon touched the chief's shoulder, and a minute later Dandy Dick uttered a howl of pain and staggered back.

"Bear move just as Black Feather shoot!" exclaimed several Indians, but this consolation afforded the young chief no pleasure for he bit his lip while he stared at the grizzly, who was dancing for pain while he looked at a foreleg which was bleeding profusely.

"Him can't git away anyhow," said Black Feather at last. "Black Feather meant to cripple him so he could lead us to his master. Let us go down an' make the bear tell the truth."

The Sioux's words were received with delight, and all at once the entire band sprung from the ambush and descended like an avalanche upon the wounded bear.

Dandy Dick's eyes seemed to flash fire as he rose on his hind feet and greeted the Indians with a fierce growl.

His left foreleg was evidently broken, for it hung useless at his side, while blood streamed in torrents from it.

"Where master, bear?" asked Black Feather halting in front of the wounded monster, but well out of the way of his claws. "Bear must tell or we hang him to limb just as the pale-faces hang their bad brethren."

Dandy Dick's answer was, of course, a mad growl which meant defiance and contempt.

"Bear fool for talkin' that way!" cried the young Sioux. "Him will sing another song when the twisted ropes of the Sioux encircle his neck. Black Feather ask now for the last time: where white killer, bear?"

Another growl followed by a futile plunge forward was the animal's reply. Black Feather drew back with a cry of terror although the claws would have fallen far short of his precious person.

"Git ropes ready!" he cried to his followers. "We will hang the bear till he offers to guide us to his master."

A number of stout lariats were at once produced. These were twisted together until a rope strong enough to hang an ox was formed.

A slip noose was left at one end, and Black Feather ordered one of the Indians to lasso the bear.

This was no easy task for Dandy Dick seemed to understand his enemies' tactics, and maneuvered to escape the noose. Several throws proved futile, and it was not until the grizzly was induced to rise on his hind feet, that a successful cast was made.

Loud yells of triumph that echoed far down the trail greeted this success, but Black Feather and his followers soon learned that if they had lassoed one of Bill Bravo's dangerous pets, they had by no means deprived him of his strength.

It took the united strength of more than half of the Indians to keep him from rushing upon them despite his wounded leg, and he was not brought to terms until the rope had been thrown over a limb directly overhead and a severe choking administered by a united effort.

Dandy Dick struggled more furiously than ever, but the stout cord encircled his throat, and twenty red Samsons were tugging at the rope.

"Pull 'im up!" cried Black Feather. "Bear tell where white killer is when we hang him awhile."

A half smothered growl, a pull altogether, and Dandy Dick, unable to disengage the noose, began to leave the ground!

The Sioux were delighted with the work on hand. Black Feather's eyes danced with glee, and he shouted loud at the antics of their victim.

The limb was not far above ground, but when the bear's head touched it, his feet failed to touch earth. He was literally hanged!

"Him tell now. Let 'im down, braves."

Dandy Dick was lowered, choked almost into unconsciousness, and he would have fallen in a heap at the foot of the tree if his tormentors had permitted it.

Black Feather stepped forward and began to taunt the grizzly; at the end of his insults he demanded to be guided to Bill Bravo. Dandy Dick eyed him fiercely as he gasped for breath, and the Sioux at last bit his lip and drew back.

"Bear no tell yet," he grated turning to his warriors. "Him must hang this time till him willin' to tell."

Dandy Dick was jerked up for the second time, and the Indians were holding him in mid-air when the sharp report of a rifle cleft the air, and the grizzly fell to the ground like a bag of lead!

The Indians who held the rope thus relieved of the bear's weight—for the cord had been severed by a bullet—fell backward in a heap, while Black Feather and the other red-skins turned toward the marksman.

Not far away—so near, indeed, that his features were quite visible—stood a youth who held in each hand a large revolver. A recently discharged rifle rested against the side of a grizzly larger than the one on whom the Sioux had just been wreaking their vengeance.

"Touch that bear again and I'll send some of you to the death-lodge before your time!" came across the space between the youth, and the Indians. "When you touch Dandy Dick you touch me, and Rocky Dan, for that matter. You have already shot the grizzly, I believe. Villains! I ought to open my six-chambered batteries on your scarlet skins. Advance, Rocky."

The big bear gave the speaker a look and advanced with a growl toward the Indians. He was accompanied by the youth who walked with a limp, but his hands held the cocked revolvers on a level with the Indians' breasts.

"I heard your devilish yells, but I did not think Dandy Dick was in your power, until Rocky Dan had coaxed me from the cave, and to a spot from which I could witness your brutality," he continued, as not an Indian stirred. "Stand where you are, you red fiends, or I'll send death into your ranks in two forms!"

Black Feather and his braves did not obey Dictionary Nat's command; they instinctively recoiled.

"Is the bear dead?"

"Him no much hurt," ventured the Sioux chief.

"You lie! You have killed the animal that saved my life last night."

At that moment Dandy Dick moved and tried to single out the youth whose voice he had evidently recognized.

Rocky Dan uttered a growl and plunged forward to halt over his companion whose blood he snuffed for a moment, and then glared fiercely at the frightened Indians whom he seemed about to charge.

Nat hurried forward, and in a tone of command checked the enraged grizzly.

He stood directly beneath the limb to which Dandy Dick had been twice drawn, and his revolvers looked sternly into the faces of the speechless Sioux.

"I ought to teach you mountain vagabonds a lesson!" he hissed. "If I had witnessed the shooting of Dandy Dick there would be more than one dead Sioux where you stand now. Why did you hang the grizzly. Speak!"

"Him no tell where white killer is," ventured Black Feather when the fingers of Dictionary Nat seemed to press the triggers of the weapons that looked into his face.

"Hanging would not give you the information you want."

"Bear like him smart enough to talk if him want to."

A smile flitted across Nat's face.

"You should have sought me out," he said; "but I should not have enlightened you. My opinion is that you will see Bill Bravo soon enough."

"Him shoot Revelation last night."

"I know that."

"But him no kill 'em!"

Nat started.

"What! Revelation Rube not dead?" he cried.

"Fate is preserving the devil for me!"

"Bullet find Revelation's breast, but no slay 'im," Black Feather continued. "Him had hurt, though; mebbe die before sun down."

"I should be where he is!" flashed Nat. "The wretch may die before I can satisfy my vengeance."

"That true, white boy. Black Feather no hunt you now; him want the pale-face who shoot Karl the Killer. Revelation's men huntin' 'im now; but they no find 'im because the Sioux want 'im too badly."

"The men of Cinnamon may have found Bill," passed through Nat's mind. "He has been absent some hours from the cave. He went away to discover where Rocky Dan buried the cubs, but the bear came back alone, and he is still absent. If they have found the bear-tamer they will make short work with him before the court they will organize in Cinnamon. I should be there now. These Indians shall not keep me back!"

His eyes met those of Black Feather as he finished.

"Boy no shoot Karl," the Indian said. "If him take down his pistols Black Feather will leave him with the bears."

There was honesty in the Sioux's look and tone.

"Agreed!" cried Nat eagerly. "I did not come to this country for the purpose of dyeing my hands with Indian blood. I hate but one man among these mountains. I hate and hunt him because he slew my father in one of the happiest homes east of the Great River. Last night I was told that Revelation Rube was dead. Now you make my heart leap for joy, for you tell me that the villain still lives."

Black Feather turned to his braves.

"Boy no hate us," he said. "Him white killer's friend, that all. Revelation could have saved Karl the Killer's life mebbe, but him no do it. Let white boy go down to the pale men's town, and strike the serpent him hates. Black Feather say let 'im go. The Sioux will hunt white killer till they find his scalp."

"Yes, you can hunt Bill," said Nat who believed that the bear-tamer was at the hour in the clutches of the roughs of Cinnamon. "If we are not entirely friends, we need not fight here."

"That so, white boy. Black Feather an' his braves keep on the trail."

The Sioux were only too eager to withdraw from the two revolvers that covered them, and from the threatening looks of Rocky Dan the big grizzly.

The two bears growled regretfully on seeing the Indians depart, and Nat Grayscot felt relieved when the last red-skin had disappeared.

"I will devote one moment to you, Dandy Dick," he said stooping over the animal for whom he had just risked his life.

The grizzly who had recovered from the severe choking administered by the twisted lariats held out his wounded paw, and Nat soon perceived that the leg had been broken by Black Feather's ball.

"I would kill the Sioux if he were here now!" he flashed, sending a look of rage down the mountain trail. "But he has escaped you for the present, Dandy. I trust your teeth will meet in his flesh in the near future. No! you can't go with Rocky Dan and I. Hobble back to the cave. You can do that. We are going down to Cinnamon."

Nat waved his hand toward the retreat as he spoke, and Dandy Dick seemed to understand all.

"My leg hurts me now," Nat went on. "I couldn't walk to the rough's rendezvous, yet I must go thither. Death may be tugging at Revelation Rube's heart-strings. Rocky Dan is as good as a horse, though not so fast."

The big grizzly did not object when Nat mounted him and urged him forward.

The ride was without incident, and Nat, to his surprise, found Cinnamon comparatively deserted.

"They are all at Idaho Ike's!" he exclaimed. "They are holding Judge Lynch's court over somebody—Bill, perhaps—in that den."

He crossed the square to hear a voice that sent a thrill of revenge through his heart.

"Let ther boys stan' back. We kin fight hyar, Placer!" were the words the avenger heard.

He halted Rocky Dan in front of the den and sprung from his broad back.

Then he uttered the words that cleared a path to Revelation Rube, who fronted the door pistol in hand.

"I am not too late!" murmured Nat. "Fate has preserved the great villain for my aim."

The next instant one of his revolvers spoke, and his father was avenged.

CHAPTER XV.

A BRIEF RESPIRE.

"THE boy did that!" ejaculated Placer Pandey, as we may still call Roger Norton, as Revelation Rube reeled away with the revolver clutched in his death-struck hand. "I always had a notion that fate would bring the two together again."

With shouts of revenge the roughs of Cinnamon had leaped to the door, and thence into the street, where they halted before Nat's two revolvers.

"I want but one life, and that I have taken," said the avenger, coolly. "If I am assaulted I shall defend myself to the bitter end. I have backing, as you can see!" and his gaze wandered for a moment to the grizzly at his side.

Rocky Dan showed his teeth, and his eyes evinced an eagerness which told the Tigers that

the old bear was ready to precipitate himself upon them.

Silently and without show the men who belonged to the Cherub Shooting Club withdrew from Revelation Rube's friends and cocked their revolvers.

A deadly encounter was imminent.

"A life for a life! That's the law west o' ther Mississipp," was heard in Wildcat Carl's rough voice. "Ther boy hez carried it out. We shall stan' by 'im!"

Solid Sol and his men made no reply.

Behind them, on the rough floor of Idaho Ike's den, lay their reckless leader, stiffening in death.

It was evident that the Tigers were burning to avenge him, but not a revolver was lifted against Dictionary Nat.

For several moments this startling tableau was not disturbed.

"Ef ther boy will tell us ther whys an' wharfores ov his shot we might fix things up fur ther present," suddenly said Solid Sol.

Wildcat Carl looked at Nat.

"I will tell you," the latter said, and a minute later he was rehearsing the story of Rube's crime, and his (Nat's) hunt for vengeance to the bronze crowd.

Not once was he interrupted.

As he neared the end Nat saw a number of hammers fall lightly upon the deadly cartridges, and not a few were replaced in capacious pockets on their owners' hips.

Solid Sol was one of the most absorbed auditors.

"Rube did all thet, did he?" he said, when Nat had finished.

"He did. I will swear it."

"No use ov thet. We'll tackle onto yer word, youngster. Revelation ar' dead this time, sartin. Ef you hed held yer fire a minute er two death would hev claimed 'im anyhow. Ther grim monster hez been holdin' a cold deck ag'in' Rube ever since last night."

"Then my life hunt has ended at last."

Nat spoke these words with the satisfaction of one who had reached the end of a long journey.

"You kin go, boy," Solid Sol said. "But my advice is fur you to make yerself scarce in these parts."

"I have nothing to keep me here now."

Nothing more was to be said.

Nat could see a few revolvers in the hands of the Cinnamon Tigers, but they were not going to harm him then. The eyes of their swarthy owners were threatening, full of revenge.

"Come, Rocky," he said to the bear, but not before a slight nod and a significant glance from Wildcat Carl had admonished him to move away.

"It is not all over yet. I was mistaken," the avenger said to himself. "Those roughs will hunt me down. They let me off because a collision with Wildcat Carl and his men was not to their liking just now. Bill Bravo is not here. If he is alive I must find him as quickly as possible. We must stand side by side or back to back from this day."

Nobody seemed to take any notice of his departure.

In the excitement of the hour he had forgotten his wound, and was walking at the grizzly's side.

"Hold a moment, Nathan!" said a voice that made him stop and he looked over his shoulder to see the familiar face of Placer Pandey.

"The rest of us might as well go along," continued the old miner coming up. "My hunt ended just when and where yours did."

Before Nat could reply, a young girl emerged from one of the cabins and approached the pair. It was Posy Nell.

"I am so glad that you are safe," she said halting in front of the avenger, and in a tone which possessed more than a passing interest for him. "The secret is out at last."

"But Rube did not reveal it," said Placer smiling.

"Then you must censure me for not keeping my promise."

"But I do not."

"Ah!"

"I had a secret, too," the miner said before Nell could reply. "My hunt has been for my child. I have found her."

An exclamation of surprise, an incredulous stare at the couple, was Nat's response.

"Posy Nell is Ada Norton from this day," the miner continued. "We are going to unite our fortunes with yours."

"No; that will never do. Revelation Rube's men will turn on me before another day."

"There may not be any left to turn when

the sun rises again. A shooting match is to take place in Cinnamon before that hour."

"Are you certain of this?"

"I know it. When a cage gets too full of bears there is certain to be some hard fighting. Don't object to our intentions. We are going with you. I have seen you tried, and you have not been found wanting. The Sioux are hunting your companion. The Cherubs saved him from Revelation Rube's halter awhile back, now the Indians are after him. We must all stand together. To the mountains, boy."

The young avenger acquiesced, and the party soon had their backs turned upon the city of the roughs.

Nat once more sat on Rocky Dan's back, and the mountain trail became the little band's road.

He led Placer Pandey and Posy Nell to the cave which they approached with caution.

A low growl and the head of a grizzly greeted them as they stepped across the threshold.

"You are here, Dandy Dick, but where is your master?" exclaimed Nat.

Bill Bravo was not to be seen, and after a brief examination the Avenger informed Placer that the bear-tamer had not been to the cave since his departure.

"Listen!" suddenly cried Nell. "Was that not a shot? There is another, and another still!"

Her father was already at the entrance which was almost blocked by the huge body of Rocky Dan, the big grizzly who was snuffing the air while he uttered sharp growls and showed his teeth.

"The Indians have found Bill Bravo!" ejaculated the miner.

"If the hunted did not surprise his hunters," said Nat.

The sentence had hardly left the youth's lips when the grizzly bounded away and disappeared down the bush-fringed trail before a hand could intercept him or a voice call him back.

Dandy Dick would have followed his comrade if his broken leg had not interfered.

"There goes Bravo's revolver. I have heard its voice before," said Placer as two distinct shots came up from the ground below. "The brave fellow may need help. I will throw my arm into the scale."

"So will I."

"Wounded as you are? No! it is not your fight now. Stay here and guard Nelly—Ada, I mean," and the next instant the miner, Revelation Rube's old enemy, was flying in the wake of the mad grizzly.

CHAPTER XVI.

WOLF RENDS WOLF.

"HALT! You ar' huntin' me. Hyar I am!"

These words, clearly spoken, fell like the crack of doom upon the ears of the stalwart Indians defiling through a narrow pass in the mountains within rifle-shot of the cave-home.

The leader of the band recoiled aghast, and with his red warriors stared into the face of the man who blockaded the way like a statue of bronze.

"White Killer!" fell from the lips of the braves.

"It's all ther same to me what I'm called so I'm hyar ready fur ther fracas!" was the response that was shot from behind the hands that thrust a pair of revolvers into the faces of the braves. "I've been watchin' you snakes more than an hour. I've see'd you crawlin' hyar an' thar lookin' fur me. Now I'm hyar in ther flesh, large ez life, an' eager fur the scrimmage. We had to meet some time, an' I'm not used to puttin' off ther evil hour. I hevn't got a bar to help me, but I hold in my hands twelve through tickets to kingdom come. Shall I proceed to distribute them, my red varmints?"

There was a distance of twenty-five feet between Bill Bravo and his enemies, and the bear-tamer shortened it by a few inches as the last word dropped from his lips.

"One—two—three! Hyar goes, Black Feather."

At that moment the revolvers went off simultaneously, and two Indians fell back bored through the brain by the deadly bullets of the mountaineer's weapons.

Black Feather himself had been spared, although he had presented a prominent target to Bill's aim.

A third shot placed another Indian *hors du combat*, and then, having recovered, the Sioux rushed forward, straight into the jaws of death.

Fast and furious, although he retreated a step the fearless man poured the contents of his weapons into the midst of his foes!

"I'm always on hand when wanted, an' some-

times a few minutes afore!" followed the shots. "This an't fur ther cubs, mind ye. I've settled the score with Revelation. This ar' ther settlement ov a personal account. I'm a Cherub, don't ye know? An' a Cherub kin shoot!"

The Sioux seemed bent on taking the mountaineer alive. They recoiled once more when they might have shot him down, but for a moment only.

Black Feather led them forward again. Each red-skin seemed a tiger.

All at once a tomahawk, hurled past the chief's head, struck Bill a sidelong blow in the face. It was not thrown to kill, else the keen edge of the weapon would have opened his cheek.

A mad blow it was, and the slayer of Karl the Killer was forced back. The band rushed forward, and before he could recover they were upon him like wolves.

Down he went but the next moment was on his feet again beating them off with the empty revolvers, dealing blows that told.

But resistance against such terrible odds was useless, still Bill Bravo continued the struggle.

It was when twenty hands held him, when ten at least were trying at once to throttle him, that the Indians were startled by a terrible growl, enough to appal the stoutest heart, and before they could meet the new enemy a huge grizzly threw himself upon them.

The bear entered the contest like a thunder-bolt.

The gigantic paws struck blows that scattered and killed like a blast of death, and the redskins recoiled with cries of terror. But not until Black Feather had been slain and every hand wrenched from Bill Bravo's throat.

"Jes' in ther nick ov time, Rocky," said the mountaineer. "Ye'r' bizness when you put yer paw into a scrimmage. We'll finish ther game together."

The bear-king picked up one of his revolvers, but the few remaining Indians were now flying from the field. The teeth and claws of Rocky Dan were too formidable for them.

"Am I too late?" asked a voice that made Bill Bravo turn.

"A little too late, unless you can outrun a Sioux, Placer," said the mountaineer, recognizing the old miner, who had come up armed for the battle. "Rocky Dan war reinforcement enough. He always holds trumps!"

The big grizzly seemed to enjoy Bill's praise, for he exhibited his teeth in a bearish grin, and would have chased the remnant of Black Feather's band if the mountaineer had not called him off.

"They won't fool with me an' the b'ars any more," Bill resumed. "Whar ar' ther boy?"

"At the cave. We're all there."

"All, Placer? I don't understand ye."

The miner briefly narrated the events which had just transpired in Cinnamon.

"I'm goin' down thar ag'in," Bill said at the conclusion of the narrative. "Ef they fight it out to-night, Placer, I must be on hand."

"You?"

"A'n't I a Cherub? Didn't they initiate me when I war absent, an' then snatch me from ther noose? Ez I'm a member in good standin'; my duty is to help my pard. I go to Cinnamon to take a hand in ther biggest game what war ever played thar. One gang ov b'ars ar' enough for one den. Cinnamon ar' too small to hold two."

Placer did not argue the case further with the determined mountaineer, and the trio went back to the cave.

"You three go at once to Virginia City," he said. "Ther roads ar' cl'ar now. To-morrow it may be full ov wolves. I'm goin' to Cinnamon. Bill Bravo's motto is: 'Always stan' by yer pards!'"

Arguments and entreaties availed nothing, and an hour later the mountain cave was deserted by everything living save the wounded grizzly, Dandy Dick, who leaned against the mouth of the retreat and growled his displeasure.

Bill Bravo and Rocky Dan were on their way to Cinnamon City.

Four days later a ponderous two-wheeled vehicle, drawn by a horse and guarded by a bronze-faced man and a grizzly king, rumbled into Virginia City and created no little excitement.

"The man is Bill Bravo!" exclaimed one of the spectators, a youth, who sprung from a companion's side and joined the crowd by which the two were surrounded.

In the cart lay another bear, whose paw was bandaged and splintered like a broken human limb.

"Hyar you ar', Dictionary, safe an' sound," exclaimed the driver of the ambulance, on catching sight of the youth who was pressing through the crowd to greet him. "An' I'm hyar, too, in pretty much ther same condition. Did we hev ther shootin'-match? Wal, I should observe!" and the rough fellow laughed.

"And the Cherubs came off victorious, Bill?"

"Kinder so," was the reply. "Sech a shootin'-match war never hed afore. Ther programme formed by a committee in ther afternoon ov thet day war carried out 'at night. It war fun ef it war earnest. Thet's ther fullest graveyard in the Rockies—ther one up thar to Cinnamon. Lots ov cabins to rent up thar, too. Jes' afore I left, Wildcat an' me posted a notice thet read: 'This hull town to rent,' fur Wildcat an' yours truly ar' the only relics ov thet terrible shootin'-match."

Dictionary Nat uttered an exclamation of horror.

"Wildcat went further north whar he expects to git up a new Cherub club; but he'll never find another that will shoot like ther old one."

Thus in rough and, at times disjointed, sentences was told the story of the terrible conflict between the rival factions of Cinnamon, the City of the roughs.

Bill Bravo and his grizzlies found an asylum in Virginia City until Dandy Dick's limb healed, and he then announced his intention of going East with the little party soon to start.

"I'll take ther grizzlies along jes' to show 'em ther best pards a man ever hed!" he said, and he did.

East of the Father of Waters Ada Norton, or Posy Nell as Bill Bravo persisted in calling her, became Nat Grayscot's bride, and the assembled guests were delighted to see two real grizzlies dance at the wedding.

Nat, however, watched the old bears with pride.

THE END.

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